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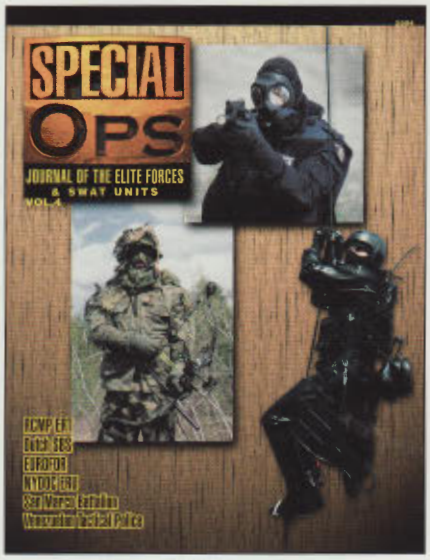
RCMP ERT
Dutch SBS
EUROFOR
NYDOC ERU
San Marco Battalion
Venezuelan Tactical Police



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Gilles Rivet

RCMP ERT

A Different Kind of "Mountie"

A group photo of the RCMP's ERT—taken prior to a tactical deployment "somewhere" in the Canadian capital.

The darkness and silence were shattered by the eruption of the device. A blinding flash of light followed by an ear-drum splitting explosion that shocked the residents of the apartment block into several seconds of stymied confusion. Before the smoke can billow to the ceiling and ignite the detectors in the hallway, a heavy oak door has been popped off its hinges, and men, dressed in black, have filtered through the apartment with determined speed. Anyone not heeding the warning to get on the floor with their hands spread is pounded upon by men wearing Nomex and Kevlar, and who carry German-produced submachine guns. The pre-dawn raid, an explosive wake-up call to the residents of an Ontario suburb who were also selling crack-cocaine, was the work of one of the most famed and fabled police departments in the world—the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The red-coated Mountie, with broad-brimmed Stetson hat and a firm and resolute smile, is the dominant image of Canada around the world

With MP5s and 12-gauge at the ready, ERT officers prepare to gain entrance to a "barricaded" location during tubular-assault exercises.

RCMP ERT officers use one of the most effective and low-tech pieces of equipment available to SWAT cops—the battering ram. Very few doors and obstacles can withstand the penetrating power of a police battering ram in the proper hands.

With his MP5 slung over his shoulder and around his Kevlar vest, a RCMP ERT officer bangs in a door with his trusted battering ram.

and it is the image that many think of when hearing the words Royal Canadian Mounted Police. But there is much more to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police than image. From the beginning of its 125 years history to the present day, this unique law enforcement agency has served the people of Canada with diligence and by establishing—and maintaining—order in the frontier reaches of this vast country. As the nation grew and

As he maintains constant communications with the officers inside the targeted location, an ERT officer man's a ballistic-vigil behind the safe cover of a firing position.

"Room Number Three Clear!" An ERT entry team makes the quick, though methodical, search of a targeted location as they open doors and closets in search of perpetrators and evidence.

Once the front door of a targeted located is breached, ERT officers cover the precarious opening with their MP5s, while the entry team races inside and secures the perpetrators.

developed, and its population established communities and explored new ones, the role of the RCMP and the Mountie became even more important.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is Canada's federal police force and is also contracted to serve as the police force for all provinces (except Ontario and Quebec), the two territories, and nearly 200 municipalities; approximately fifty percent of its members are engaged in provincial and municipal policing. The RCMP, under the Federal RCMP Act, enforces throughout Canada laws made by, or under, the authority of the Canadian Parliament. Administration of justice within the provinces, including enforcement of the Criminal Code, is part of the power and duty delegated to the provincial governments. The RCMP is also involved in counter-intelligence and counter-espionage operations, as well as counter-terrorist investigations and operations. It is responsible for law and order from the arctic to the American border, from the Atlantic to Pacific oceans. It is once of the most diverse and high-tech police departments in the world.

Yet because of Canada's vast geography, and diverse population, it would appear as if Canada is an impossible land to police. So grand are its frontiers and so isolated are many of its population centers, that any national police force would need the most sophisticated tools, the most expansive fleet of vehicles, aircraft and helicopters, and the most

Because of the diverse terrain that they cover, ERT officers are trained—and well-versed—in targeting any type of structure: be it a fortified embassy or a lower-income home used as a crack-house by drug pushers. Here, in one of the poor suburbs of Ottawa, an ERT entry team breaches the front door of a crack-house as they serve an early morning narcotics warrant.

During a dignitary protection detail, a two-man ERT counter-sniper team scans the crowd for any potential threat to the principal. The sniper is armed with the Remington M24, while the observer carries the Canadian-produced C8 5.56mm carbine—the local version of the American M4.

elaborate network of high-tech communications to meet the daily challenges and threats. The RCMP is divided into "E" Division, responsible for British Colombia; "M" Division, which covers the Yukon; "D" Division, which patrols Manitoba; "F" Division, which polices most of Saskatchewan; "G" Division, responsible for the Northwest Territories; "K" Division, responsible for Alberta; "O" Division, which covers Ontario; "C" Division, which patrols much of Quebec; "A" Division, responsible for the National Capital Region; "B" Division covers Newfoundland; "H" Division is responsible for Nova Scotia; "J" Division polices in New Brunswick; and, "L" Division covers Prince Edward Island.

The RCMP first thought of establishing a *national* para-military/police counter-terrorist force in 1972, following the Munich Olympic Massacre. The Black September attack in Munich and the subsequent botched rescue attempted at Fürstenfeldbruk Airport had special significance for the Canadians since they would be hosting the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal. As a result, in 1975, the Canadian government authorized the RCMP to create a hostage-rescue unit; the official mandate was a "trained means of intervention to domestic armed and barricaded situations." The unit, called the Emergency Response Teams of the RCMP, first borrowed its initial tactics and strategies from already existing North American police departments (such as the Los Angeles Police Department's SWAT Platoon, and the New York City Police Department's Emergency Service Unit). Military tactics were taken from instruction given by the Canadian military—especially the 1st Special Service Force.

Taking a page out of the LAPD SWAT and United States Secret Service handbook, ERT officers prepare to deploy on the "skids" of an upgraded Chevy Suburban.

With weapons at the ready, an ERT assault force prepares to engage a targeted location. The ERT deploys its Suburbans on high-risk warrants, and on dignitary protection details.

Initially, the RCMP ERTs consisted of seven-man teams—*all volunteers*—that included two snipers armed with high-powered weapons, such as M-16A1 5.56mm assault rifles fitted with high-powered scopes and other military-issue sniper weapons such as the Canadian C3A1 7.62mm sniping rifle. As far as hostage-rescue forces

As a cloud of smoke from three diversionary devices dissipates through a hallway, an ERT entry-team, armed with Body Bunkers and MP5s, prepares to enter a barricaded location.

An ERT officer takes aim with his SIG Sauer P226 9mm pistol, complete with a flash-light attachment.

Using his partner's Body Bunker ballistic shield for cover, an ERT officer takes aim with his 12-gauge shotgun.

On the range with the RCMP's ERT. Firearms proficiency is preached and practiced with religious zeal in the ranks of the ERT, and unit officers are considered "expert shots." Note flash-light attachment to the officer's SIG Sauer P226.

go, the ERT was a small-scale stop-gap meant to prevent a repeat of the Munich Massacre. The 1976 Summer Games were peaceful and without incident, even though Palestinian terrorist groups did threaten to attack the Israeli team, and several threats were made against the South African team, as well. In addition to the ERTs who perform this function on a national level, a team functioned in each province—especially in the National Capital Region (NCR) of Ottawa where the RCMP employed a full-time ERT on permanent stand-by status. This team's responsibility was to provide an immediate and decisive response to any terrorist attack against an embassy, consulate or government buildings in the capital.

Following the surge of international terrorism in the mid-1980s, especially hijackings, aircraft bombings and sea-jackings, the RCMP decided that it needed a larger, and more responsive type of force to meet and neutralize any terrorist situation on Canadian soil, or even perhaps to end terrorist situations involving Canadian nationals abroad. Initially, the ERT was a fifty-man size force which consisted of the most capable volunteers already in ERT service. Eventually, however, the size of the force grew to be seventy-two man-strong.

The ERT was a true hostage-rescue force similar in mandate and

A four man fire-team gets ready to empty a magazine's worth of 9mm ammunition while on one of the many ranges the ERT employs.

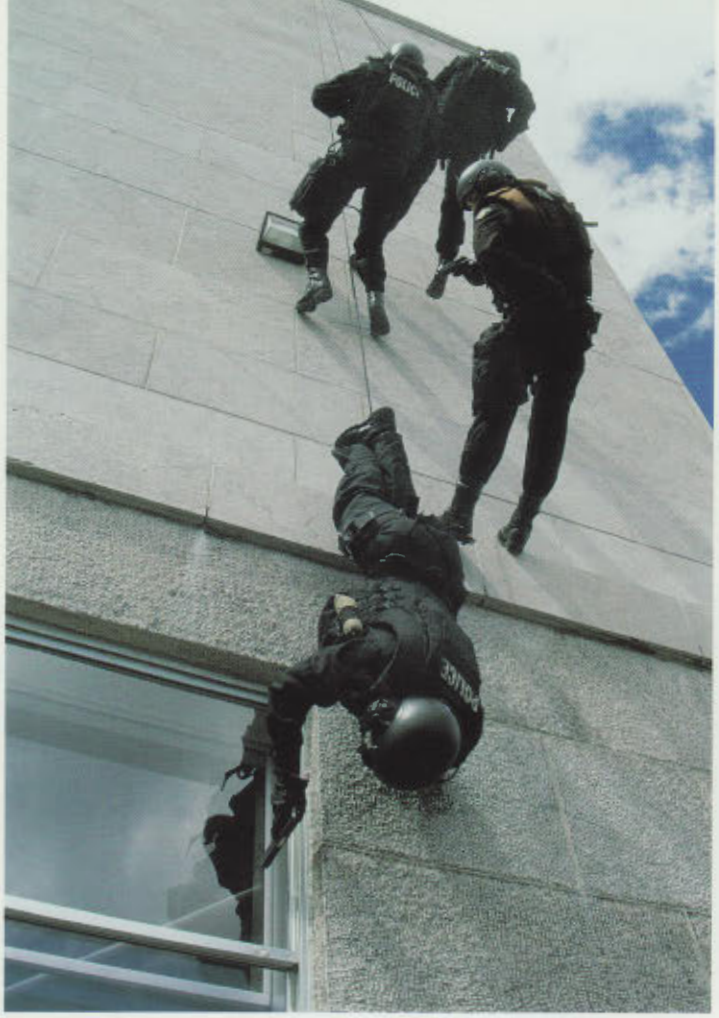
Dressed in their black tactical gear, ERT officers prepare to rappel on to a targeted floor, during assault training on a high-rise "borrowed" for the day.

structure to Germany's GSG-9 and the FBI's HRT. They, in fact, received supplemental training from these units, as well as from Britain's Special Air Service, the U.S. Army's 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta, and, it has been suggested, several other European and Asian counter-terrorist forces. The ERT borrowed the tactics of many of these forces, including much of the equipment these forces carry into a situation—from the Heckler and Koch MP5 series of 9mm submachine guns used by virtually every hostage-rescue unit (HRU) around the world, to the British G60 Stun Grenade.

Service attachment to the ERT was strictly on a voluntary basis or regular duty officers with several years of experience in the RCMP. The ERT selection process was considered to be the most arduous in all of Canada, rivaling even the extremely difficult and highly selective process used by the Canadian military when selecting candidates for its elite 1st SSF. Training for all those who passed the selection process included four months of combat and tactical instruction, with snipers receiving an additional two months of training. A tour of duty with the squad consisted of a three year rotation, although the options existed for an extended length of duty dependent solely on the officer maintaining his combat and profession proficiency.

The ERT enjoyed very close relations with the FBI's HRT, Britain's Scotland Yard and various European counter-intelligence and counter-terrorist organizations and agencies; they have also enjoyed close-ties with the Israelis. It is believed that these national alliances, especially now with the U.S. Army and Britain's SAS, existed with the newly formed Canadian military counter-terrorist unit.

Whether it is called upon to rescue an ambassador held hostage in an embassy, or gain entrance to an apartment where a barricaded perpetrator refuses to exit, rope and climbing skills are an essential part of the ERT repertoire. Here, a squad of ERT officers employ the "Australian rappel" in order to be able to descend down the façade of a tower during rope training.



"Knock Knock, who's there?" An ERT officer provides a hostage-taker with a rude awakening, during hostage-rescue exercises in one of the many high-rise buildings that dot the skyscraper landscape of Ontario.

Dramatic photograph of an ERT rappel team in action.

The ERT was never operationally deployed in its seven years of activation. In April 1993, the ERT was ordered to disband, as responsibility for counter-terrorist work and hostage rescue operation was transferred to a newly created and top-secret unit of the Canadian Department of National Defense known as Joint Task Force-Two (JTTF-2). According to accounts, a Joint Task Force-One was established by the Canadian military just prior to the 1990-1991 Gulf War, though it was disbanded shortly after the end of the conflict. The exact size, make-up, order of battle, listing of equipment and any other pertinent information is classified as top-secret by the Canadian military. It is, however, known that (JTTF-2) is an all-volunteer unit drawn from the three services of the Canadian military and is commanded by a lieutenant-colonel. Some experts put unit strength at between 200 and 250 men but the Forces will not confirm the size; other estimates make the unit as large as a 500-man force. According to published accounts in Canadian newspapers, the Canadian government ear-marked $20 million to start-up the new unit, though its subsequent budgets are classified top-secret. The unit is highly regarded as Canada's worst kept-secret, as it is a force that the Armed Forces Command does not comment on even though it's existence has become a matter of public knowledge. In one Montreal suburb, in fact, JTTF-2 introduced itself to nearby residents when a mini-armada of Hueys descended on the quiet weekday night with a full-scale heliborne exercise. Little information about JTTF-2's actual operational deployments are known, though it was reported that JTTF-2 was sent to Bosnia in November 1994 to rescue Canadian peacekeepers that were held hostages by Bosnian Serbs, and that marksmen were "heavily involved" in counter-sniper operations in the former Yugoslavia during both IFOR and SFOR operations. Inside Canada, JTTF-2 operators were on alert for the Commonwealth Games in Victoria in August 1994, as well as for the G-7 Summit held in Halifax in 1995, and Queen Elizabeth's visit to Canada in 1997.

JTTF-2's role as the premier national counter-terrorist force should have put the RCMP's ERT out of business, but in Ottawa, where all of the foreign embassies and ambassador residences are located, the need for an "on-call" tactical police entity was still very much a requirement. VIP and dignitary protection, as well as the take-over of embassies (and ambassador residences) besieged by demonstrators, or taken over by terrorists, are responsibilities of the ERT. The rationale behind the ERT's continued counter-terrorist mandate was simple—why handicap the national ability to respond to an incident inside Canada when, if by chance or by design, most of JTTF-2 is deployed overseas, or on another operation at the opposite end of the North American continent. Canadian government officials were also determined to have a force of "first-responders" in Ottawa in case a plane was hijacked, or in case there was an incident in an embassy. ERT officers will respond and establish a tactical perimeter around any such incident *until* JTTF-2 could arrive and take over.

As a result of the diminished responsibilities, the unit was scaled down to some forty operators, divided into five eight-man assault teams; one team is permanently on an on-call alert status. Members of the unit are all hand-picked volunteers who underwent grueling physical and psychological examinations in order to qualify, and who are full-time Mounties who have traded their Stetsons for balaclavas. Tactical hopefuls must attend an intensive five-week special operations school, and then be assigned with a senior partner in the unit for advanced study and observation. Training in the squad is virtually a full-time endeavor, though the unit does supplement its classroom and killing house instruction with actual high-risk warrants against violent criminals and drug locations.

The evolution of the RCMP and its many tasks and responsibilities, as represented by the red jacket and Stetson, and the balaclava and MP5.

The three principal uniforms of the RCMP—the tactical, the traditional, and the everyday.

Because of the vast rural territory that they must operate in, the RCMP's ERT must be as comfortable with field operations in woods and mountains, as they would be operating in the middle of a city's downtown during lunch-hour. Here, an ERT sniper dressed in camouflage fatigues, takes aim with his Remington M24 rifle during a counter-narcotics operation.

Protected from the biting cold with layers of clothing underneath his woodland pattern camouflage fatigues, an ERT sniper mans a stoic stance as he keeps his target in the center of his cross-hairs.

Perhaps reflecting on what it must have been like a hundred years earlier in the Mounties, an ERT officer takes aim with a primitive piece of weaponry, the bow, still used in the high-tech world of police special operations with deadly effectiveness.

Ideal for the removal of sentry dogs or "sentries," the bow and arrow is increasingly used by the world's top military and police tactical teams with astounding effectiveness.

In the windswept plains of northern Canada, an ERT sniper prepares to slink into the woods and a "sniper's obstacle course" during woodland exercises.

Interesting photograph of the camouflage employed by the ERT snipers.

An ERT sniper instructor lectures one of his charges during sniping training. Trained by the SAS, the ERT's counter-sniper force is considered Canada' best.

Meant to be invisible, and deadly at 1,000 feet: An ERT sniper finds comfort and camouflage in the woods near Ottawa.

An ERT counter-sniper/observer takes aim with his C8 5.56mm carbine.

Ready for a "busy" day on the range with his MP5, an ERT officer prepares to enter the "Killing House" during hostage-rescue exercises.

An ERT officer listens attentively to a tactical briefing, before executing a high-risk narcotics warrant. Note the plastic flexi-cuffs conveniently carried on his Kevlar body armor.

Covering a window with his MP5, an ERT officer makes sure that any threat posed to the rest of his team will be dealt with in an immediate three-round fashion.

An ERT officer takes aim with his SIG Sauer, on an outdoor live-fire range near Ottawa. Note the RCMP/GRC patch worn on the officer's shoulder sleeves.

Ready for the chemical agents that are about to be deployed against a barricaded suspect holding his family hostage, ERT officers take cover behind a Body Bunker as they set themselves for the inevitable assault.

Awaiting the word to fire, an ERT officer on the range readies his trigger finger for a magazine-emptying burst of 9mm fire.

Freeze....RCMP! During a hostage-taking rescue, an ERT officer pèers down the sight of his SIG Sauer P226.

All The Queen's Men

The Royal Netherlands Marine Corps 7 NL SBS

Samuel M. Katz

During ship-take-down exercises in the North Sea, 7 NL SBS and BBE operators engage in close-quarter combat drills with a sailor playing a "Tango" quickly searched and secured. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

December 19, 1997: *The winter's frost had struck the southwest sector of the NATO-led SFOR protectorate with unforgiving cruelty. The temperature hovered near the freezing mark, though the wind-chill was dancing precariously near zero degrees. Even colder was the water temperature of a brook near a series of houses, though the bone-chilling frost did not deter the squad of men, in black neoprene, laying in wait by the water's banks. They aimed their M-16A2 assault rifles at the house windows, covered doorways with laser aim-point devices attached to their Heckler and Koch MP5 9mm submachine guns, and covered a Land Rover in a drive-way with a LAW rocket ready to turn the all-terrain vehicle into a smoldering pile of smoldering steel. Dutch special forces were in the area this bone-snapping cold night, the men of the elite and ultra-top secret 108th Special Operations Company, according to several reports, and their targets were two Croatian war criminals wanted for a series of massacres and crimes against humanity that were vile, even by Bosnian standards. The unit, which traces it's history back to 1942, when a commando team was formed in Achnacarry, Scotland, is delegated most of the truly hairy "above-the-waterline" special operations missions by the Dutch Ministry of Defense. Armed with an impressive arsenal of weaponry, from C8A1/M203 assault rifle/grenade launcher combinations, to Stinger hand-held SAMs, to Jeeps armed with FN-MAG and TOW II missiles, there are few LRRP and strike assignments that this airborne-qualified special ops strike force cannot execute. Yet when it comes to missions involving combat swimming or underwater assault, or providing tactical back-up to the 108th in a freezing Bosnian brook, the Dutch Ministry of Defense calls upon the services of an elite and top-secret force of operators who are considered by virtually every special operations unit around the world as one of the premier naval commando forces in existence. That unit is the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps 7 NL SBS.*

The Royal Netherlands Marine Corps coat of arms.

Recalling Holland's one-time dominance of the world's shipping lanes, the motto of the Royal Netherlands's Marine Corps is "*Qua Pater Orbis,*" or "Wherever The World Extends." Although a force of just over 3,000 men, the RNLMC has developed into one of the world's truly elite amphibious combat units. Beyond being known for their unique raiding skills, and long-range reconnaissance patrol abilities, the Dutch Marines are, perhaps, best known for the close-knit alliance they have developed with their green beret counterparts in Great Britain. Few military forces from two separate nations have succeeded in forging such intimate ties, and such an effective working relationship; the relationship dates back to 1702 when 400 Dutch Marines participated in the capture of Gibraltar. Under NATO, the Dutch Marines are under the command of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, as part of the ACE Mobile Force (AMF) and also under the command of the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic, as joint UK/Netherlands Landing Force.* Under mobilization, the 1st Royal Netherlands Marine Corps Battalion is incorporated into the 3

** This joint-force served together in Kurdistan in "Operation Safe Haven."*

During special operations exercises in Scotland, Royal Netherlands Marine Corps officers (in blue berets) discuss amphibious assault plans with their 3 Commando Brigade counterparts. (Royal Marines PAO)

Commando Brigade Royal Marines, and the RNLMC's Combat Boat Company, with its fleet of landing craft and inflatable and rigid raiding craft modified for assault operations in the Arctic, becomes an element of the Royal Marines' 539 Assault Squadron. Like the Royal Marines, the RNLMC enjoys a unique, and close-knit esprit de corps particular of a soldier who is "the thinking man's infantry." Like the Royal Marines, the RNLMC "does the Norway," conducting its Arctic training on the frozen mountains of NATO's northern flank. Like the Royal Marines, the Isle of Sky in Scotland is the sight of the RNLMC's nine weeks of cold-weather, wet and slippery mountain warfare training; according to one serving officer in a Marine Battalion in Cambodia where Dutch Marines serve under a UN umbrella, "Everyone complains about the Norway, but if you can survive training in Scotland, you can fight anywhere on earth!"** Like the Royal Marines, the RNLMC, too, has its own force of underwater special warfare operators, and they too are known as the SBS. They are, however, the 7 NL Special Boat Section.

The men of 7 NL SBS are parachutist-trained combat swimmers considered among the world's best. In many ways, through their training, mandate, and sub-units, the Dutch SBS and British SBS are virtually indistinguishable. A Dutch SBS operator must first complete his service

*** Unlike the Royal Marines, the RNLMC conducts its desert training on the island of Curaçao in the Caribbean, and its jungle training on the island of Martinique in cooperation with the French Marines.*

In Kurdistan, during "Operation Safe Haven," Dutch Marines man a border check-post, on guard against marauding units of the Iraqi Republican Guard. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

During exercises in northern Holland, special operations units of the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps display their gear and weaponry. Of interesting note is the 7 NL SBS team (right) armed with a grappeling hook launcher. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

with the RNLMC before being able to volunteer into 7 NL SBS; even though there is one-year of mandatory military service in the Netherlands. All marines in the RNLMC are volunteers, and volunteers that must prove their worth before being allowed to enter through the gates of the RNLMC's training center. Upon completion of a successful stint in the RNLMC, a marine is entitled to submit a formal request to volunteer into the 7 NL SBS. Like the British SBS, a marine wishing to become a combat swimmer must first pass a grueling and extremely arduous selection process, and then (after only about thirty-percent pass this) endure a year long training regimen; like his counter-part in the British SBS, the candidate can be removed from the course at any time. Phases of the training include: tactical swimming; SCUBA (7 NL SBS personnel deploy the Dräger LAR-V re-breather); advanced combat jungle training (Martinique), advanced combat desert training (Curaçao); sabotage and explosives; sniping; parachuting; intelligence-gathering, tactical photography and beach reconnaissance (including a few weeks of infamous beach crawling in mud that feels like quicksand); counter-terrorist training; and, most importantly, canoeing. In terms of the 7 NL

During water-jump exercises, a stick of 7 NL SBS operators leap out of a Royal Netherlands Air Force Fokker transport over the Atlantic, during NATO exercises. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

During sabotage and mine-planting exercises held in the "friendly" waters off of Rotterdam, 7 NL SBS troopers return to ship after "successfully" sabotaged three freighters ostensibly protected by a battalion of MPs. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

During Arctic training in northern Norway for 7 NL SBS and U.S. Marine Corps special forces, a puff of green smoke indicates the DZ on the frozen stretch of earth where the day's warmest temperatures will barely break -20º (C) and where wind gusts sometimes sweep along with merciless strength at fifty miles per hour. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

SBS's infatuation with the Klepper canoe, the unit is virtually indistinguishable from their British counter-parts. In fact, just like in the British SBS, the one and only Klepper is the 7 NL SBS's main battle tank. It is used on virtually all 7 NL SBS missions as the ideal means for infiltration and fast and stealth insertion of two-man sabotage and recce squads into enemy territory.*** Upon completion of the special warfare training, the marine turned commando is known by the classification "Swimmer/Canoeist," and their operators are renowned for the long-range swimming and canoeing capabilities. During NATO maneuvers, the 7 NL SBS are ideal saboteurs, capable moving into an enemy rear, laying mines or explosives, or gathering invaluable intelligence. Their abilities are enhanced by night-vision scopes attached to helmets, and mounted on Heckler and Koch machine guns.

All operational units of the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps are incorporated in what is called the Group of Operational Units Marines (GOUM). The GOUM consists of four infantry battalions, a combat support battalion, a logistics battalion and a staff. Of the infantry battalions, the 1st and 2nd Marine Battalion are stationed in the Netherlands (in the Van Braam Houckgeest Barracks in Doorn). The 3rd Marine Battalion is a reservists-unit that can be mobilized in less than seventy-two hours, and the 4th Marine Battalion is semi-reservists-unit that provides special support services. The combat-ready units of this battalion are in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba; at Naval Base Parera, Naval Barracks Suffisant and Marine Barracks Savaneta. Also stationed in Doorn are the GOUM staff, the logistics battalion and the combat support battalion, with the exception of the boat company and the amphibious reconnaissance troop. The boat company is based in the Joost Dourlein Barracks on Texel. All landing craft used by the Marine Corps are located there. The amphibious reconnaissance troop's home base is in Den Helder.

**** Another unit that has been built along the lines of the British SBS, in name, structure and character, is the Danish Sovaerns Fromandskorps SBS, an extremely capable underwater special warfare force.*

The 7 NL SBS is a sub-unit of the Combat Support Battalion of the Group of Operational Units Marines (GOUM), although during war-time and other points of "international coordination," it is under the operations command of the British SBS; in war-time, they become the reconnaissance element of 3 Commando Brigade. The 7 NL SBS's ORBAT consists of a boating unit, an underwater unit, a delivery vehicle/insertion craft unit, and an anti-terrorist troop. Once a full-fledged operator in the 7 NL SBS, an operator's life is engulfed by training, exercises, joint maneuvers with his British and other allied counter-parts, and more training. Recently, however, the 7 NL SBS has become increasingly expert in the art of counter-terrorism, joining a long line of other naval commando units around the world (SEAL Team Six, SBS "M" Squadron, element of Israel's Flotilla 13, and the Tactical Assault Group, or TAG, of the Australian SAS) who have dedicated resources to executing maritime and seaborne hostage-rescue assaults. 7 NL SBS maintains a small force of combat divers tasked with maritime security tasks on board liners and passenger ferries (should another Achille Lauro scenario arise in Dutch waters or with a Dutch ship), as well as North Sea oil rigs.

While 7 NL SBS is the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps' elite force of amphibious explorers and combat divers, counter-terrorist duty inside Holland is reserved for another RNLMC force, made up mostly of 7 NL SBS operators. Known by the acronym of BBE (*Bijzondere Bijstands*

Somewhere, 1500 feet above the Dutch coast, a 7 NL SBS operator is launched out of a Fokker transport, for infiltration and sabotage exercises. Although all SBS operators are airborne qualified, many prefer the high-flying and often dangerous HALO water-jumps to the "routine" of static-line jumps over land. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

Eenheid), the unit answers to the Dutch Ministry of Justice and receives its orders and operational guidelines through the GOUM. It is a force of black-clad, Kevlar bound commandos, armed with—of course!—the Heckler and Koch series of modified MP5 9mm submachine guns, renowned in the international counter-terrorist community for their marksmanship and assault skills (they train with the German GSG-9, the Belgian Diane Group, the Spanish GEO, and the French GIGN and RAID units). Created in the aftermath of the 1972 Munich Olympic Massacre, their first operation was the retaking of the Scheveningen jail in October 1974 during an insurrection by interned Palestinian terrorists. Using stun grenades, the BBE operators were able to storm the prison and subdue the prisoners in hand-to-hand combat; the unit was reluctant to use deadly force (even though the prisoners were armed) making them one of the world's most humane hostage-rescue forces. Yet their most famous operation was its 1977 rescue of a schoolhouse and train seized by Moluccan terrorists. On the morning of May 23, 1977, nine young South Moluccan men, all heavily armed with submachine guns and grenades, seized control of a passenger train at de Punt with ninety-four people on board. Simultaneously, four other Moluccan terrorists took over a schoolhouse at Bovensmilde, and took 105 children and four teachers hostage. The Dutch government, as of yet immune to the terrorist onslaught that overtook much of Europe in the years 1972-77, entered into negotiations with the terrorists confident that diplomacy and good will would end the ordeal that had gripped much of Holland. They were wrong. The ordeal dragged on for three weeks, with little progress made in releasing the hostages. Finally, on June 11, the Dutch government ordered the BBE into action. At Bovensmilde, the BBE was deployed behind a protective shield of Dutch Military Police M113 APCs, and the assault on the schoolhouse succeeded without bloodshed. The train at de

Armed with an MP5 SD3 (holstered in a water-proofed canister) and specially-modified neoprene assault gear, a 7 NL SBS operator hoists himself up toward the main hold deck of a cargo ship during assault exercises. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

Punt was a different story. Dutch Marine officers realized that the BBE would need to handle the situation, and behind the scenes the BBE rigged a duplicate version of the train and spent the three weeks of the stand-off to hone their skills for the one chance at assaulting the train. Finally, the order to attack was issued. A pair of Royal Netherlands Air Force F-104 Starfighters made a low-level pass over the train, its atmospheric blast so powerful that it shocked and surprised even those terrorists expecting an assault. The BBE's entrance into the train was lightning fast—within seconds, doors had been kicked in, and six of the nine terrorists were killed; tragically, two hostages were also killed in the melee.

From Bosnia to Amsterdam, both the 7 NL SBS and the BBE stand on guard, ready to respond to harm's way at a moment's notice, should the call to action come in from The Hague.

Paddling through the weeds and murky waters of northern Holland, a 7 NL SBS Klepper contingent pushes itself into assault position, during ferry assault training. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

Prior to embarking on a waterline heli-jump from a Royal Netherlands Marine Corps Lynx chopper, a two man 7 NL SBS ready their re-breathing apparatus and survival equipment. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

Armed with Heckler and Koch MP5 SD3 9mm submachine guns, two BBE operators pose for the cameras following successful ship-assault exercises with the operators from 7 NL SBS. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

During seaborne rescue exercises, a BBE operator assumes proper firing position with his MP5A2 while manning a defensive perimeter on the deck of an oil-rig during a hostage-rescue scenario. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

BBE operators slink their way down a Royal Netherlands Marine Corps Lynx chopper, amid the spray and frigid waters of the North Sea, during hostage-rescue maneuvers with 7 NL SBS. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

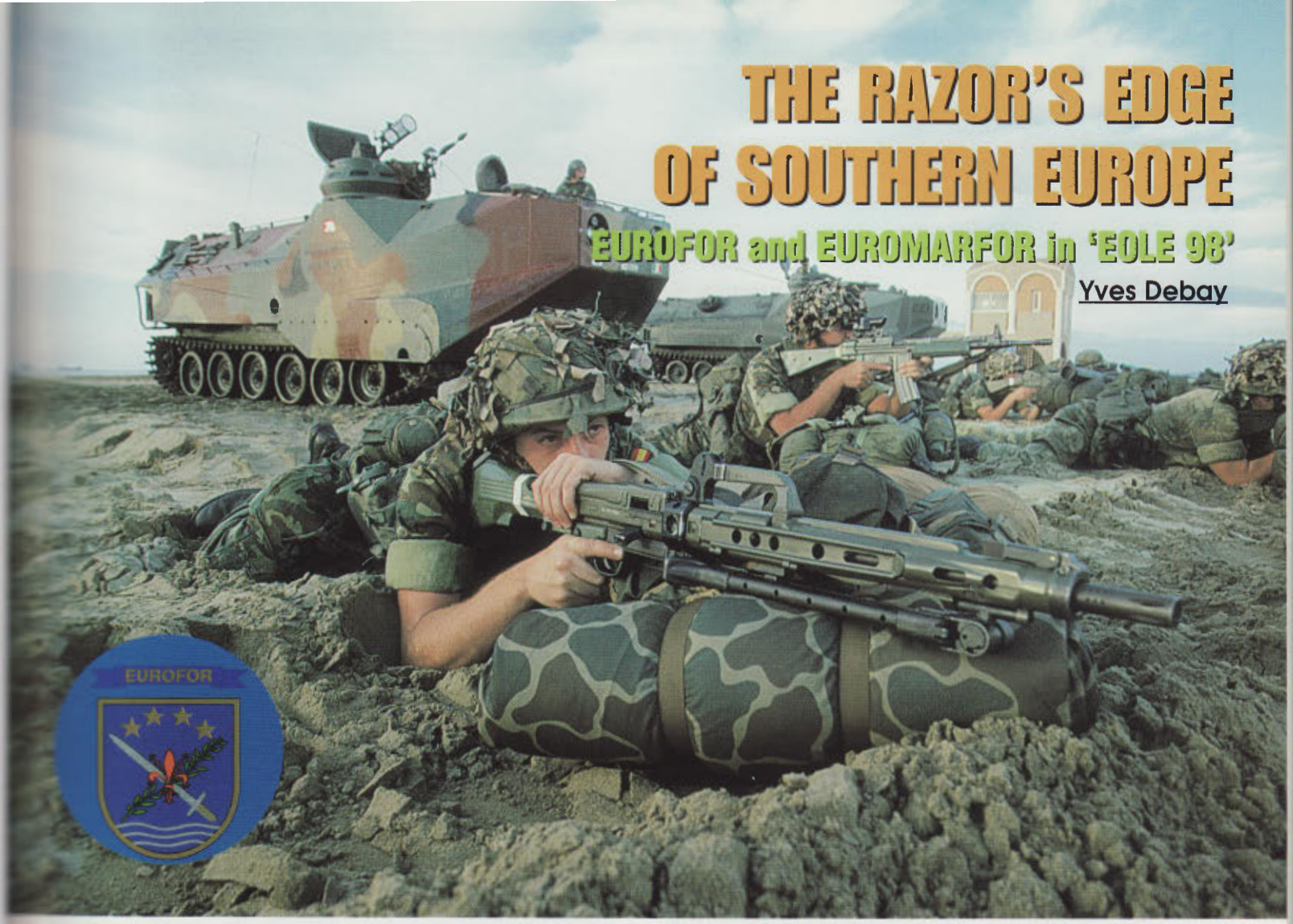
As special boat company operators look on, a four-man team of 7 NL SBS combat swimmers ready their gear for an early morning underwater recce of Rotterdam harbor. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

Stoic portrait of a 7 NL SBS operator using courage, muscle and guile, as he is hoisted toward his objective. (Courtesy: Audiovisuele Dienst Koninklijke Marine)

THE RAZOR'S EDGE OF SOUTHERN EUROPE

EUROFOR and EUROMARFOR in 'EOLE 98'

Yves Debay



Spanish Marines of the Tercio de Armada man a defensive line in the dark sands of the French Mediterranean, as they support the landing of San Marco Battalion LVTP-7s. Of interesting note is the Spanish-produced Ameli light-machine gun, a completely remodeled MG-42 configured to fire a 5.56mm round.

The potential for a southern Europe beset by racial conflagration, a footnote to the bloody vacuum of the Balkan melee, was a daunting scenario for NATO commanders. Even the most naïve student of history could look at the events of 1914 to realize that the Balkans; and ethnic conflicts, had the potential for setting the continent ablaze. After the Second World War and the peaceful resolution of the Cold War, few in NATO Headquarters wanted to see Europe ablaze for the third time in a century.

In 1992, as the Balkans began to disintegrate and crumble, the militaries of Spain, Italy, France and, later, Portugal, created the framework by which a massive rapid deployment force, made up of airborne, marine and special operations units, could be dispatched to southern European hot-spots before small crisis turned into regional wars. That framework became the European Rapid Operational Force in May 1995, a 25,000-man task force consisting of the elite military formations within the four-nation framework. EUROFOR, as the force became known, was sanctioned to execute missions as defined by the "Petersburg Declaration" which outlined European humanitarian, peace-keeping and peace-enforcing missions. The force, as a cohesive four-nation rapid deployment entity, was also to be trained and made available for missions outside the NATO context, including United Nations sanctioned operations. In establishing EUROFOR, NATO planners demanded that the force be able to fulfill three basic elements:

- To dispatch a basic military foothold on the ground at any theater of operation within five days.
- The brunt of the 25,000-man force would have to be on the ground, in full combat readiness, within fourteen days of the outbreak of any crisis.
- The remaining elements of the force, including reserve and logistic elements, would need to be deployed within twenty-five days.

EUROFOR was designed, from its inception to the point on the northern Mediterranean shoreline of troops hitting the beaches in exercises, to be used specifically and solely for the types of missions spelled out by Declaration of Petersburg as a ballistic crisis management tool aimed at preventing conflicts. The thinking behind the force's creation was that no radical leader, militia commander, ethnic commandant, rogue nation prime minister or guerrilla warlord would *dare* risk the wrath of a multi-nation invasion and occupation force should he not heed the declarations of NATO, the European Union, or the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council.

EUROFOR had one other objective of impressive note—the creators of the new entity was determined to pool the elite of the multi-national military resources availed to international operations. EUROFOR was not meant to be an "average" emergency mission task force. It was designed to be able to strike swiftly, strike fast and deploy the minimal number of personnel while wielding the maximum firepower. And, since EUROFOR was not to be a permanent military force, but rather a task-

Landings are always precarious, whether they be at night in the middle of a raging storm, or in the early morning hours of a summer's day. Forces on a beach are always vulnerable to attack—always in the cross-hairs of defenders positioned inland.

force built from existing components trained to work together, the individual units would not experience any reduction in commando training or actual operations. When an emergency would arise, the units assigned to the force would simply be mobilized and deployed. The only "permanent" unit assigned to the force was a command cadre of some 100 high-ranking officers assigned to EUROFOR HQ in Florence, Italy. The permanent headquarters in Florence is commanded alternatively for a two-year stint by a general from the contributing nations. The rotating commanders must be brilliant tacticians as well as logistics dynamos—although the force is a model of management and pre-positioning, fielding a 25,000-man pool of military might to a regional global hot-spot is no simple task.

EUROFOR was the land component of the four-nation endeavor, comprising airborne, infantry and amphibious-capable troops that could, at a moment's notice, be mobilized on board ships and at airfield tarmacs for immediate cross-continent deployment. EURORMARFOR was the naval element to this new equation. The seaborne force was designed to field, at extremely short notice, one aircraft carrier, four amphibious vessels, eleven multipurpose frigates and corvettes, two submarines (including one nuclear powered sub), two tenders, one mine-sweeper and one maritime aviation patrol element.

To mesh the cross-cultural and language-based barriers in assembling for distinctive nationalities, EUROFOR uses Spanish, Italian,

Sea-sick and laden down by some forty kilograms of equipment and weaponry, Spanish Marines move inland after establishing a beachhead. They carry the indigenously-produced CETME L 5.56mm assault rifle.

Spanish Marines come ashore courtesy of the slow-moving, lightly-armored though still-functioning LVTP-7 Amtraks. Marines race out of the rear-cargo door of the LVTP-7 amid the quaint tranquility of the coastal town of Port-Leucate. "Don't let the beauty of the surrounding villages and towns fool you," a Spanish Marine commander told his men, "Bosnia was once picturesque as well!"

With the Italian Navy's San Georgio landing ship in the background, a stream of Italian San Marco Battalion Amtraks head for the French coast.

An Italian Navy LCU unloads a Spanish Marine HUMVEE from the Marine's 2nd Battalion.

Although soon to be replaced, the LVTP-7s have served the San Marco Battalion with tenacious reliability for some twenty-years, as seen by the coming ashore of several Amtraks during the opening salvo of "EOLE 98."

French and Portuguese as their official languages. To hone the skills and requirements of the force, EUROFOR and EUROMARFOR conducts annual and biannual exercises meant to prepare the multinational force for immediate and emergency deployments throughout the continent. In June 1998, along the southern coast of France at Port-Leucate, an allied joint exercise, code-named "EOLE 98," was carried out with all the elements within the EUROFOR framework, and EUROFOR was henceforth operational. The exercise and its scenario, involving the break-up of the fictitious "United Periwinkle States Confederation" into two independent states, Greenland and Yellowland, mirrored the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia.

The exercise's objective, as illustrated in this photo-journal, was to see how a European military option could have been employed to end the madness and civil war of such a conflagration before it even began. "EOLE 98" was a smashing success and proof that multinational special operations strike forces, whether established to obliterate a target and occupy it, or to reclaim a scarred land and restore peace and order, could function as a cohesive and integral body.

"EOLE 98" was not just solely an attempt of EUROFOR units to push their joint-capabilities to the envelope. European military commanders realize, after bitter experience in Bosnia, the Middle East and Somalia, that the southern tier of NATO remains the volatile flash-point of the continent. The foresight of realizing that a region has the potential of once again embroiling much of Europe in war is commendable to NATO commanders, European Union politicians, and the field level corps commander of the Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese militaries. The decision to field a force designed to act as a deterrence to a breakdown in security and sensibility is crucial in preserving the fragile threads of peace that southern Europe enjoys today.

** The author would like to thank Lieutenant-Colonel Winckler (EUROFOR), and Captain Alberto Guevera Martinez for their kind assistance in the assembly of this article and for the chance to join the units in the field.*

Excellent close-up photograph of a San Marco Battalion LVTP-7—closely guarded by its crew.

The cargo-hold capabilities of an LVTP-7 are displayed to advantage as a force of Italian Marines emerges from the rear of the hulking amphibious APC.

The compliment and cargo of a San Marco Battalion LVTP-7 prepare a defensive perimeter on the beachhead, courtesy of well-trained trigger fingers and a battery of ATGWs.

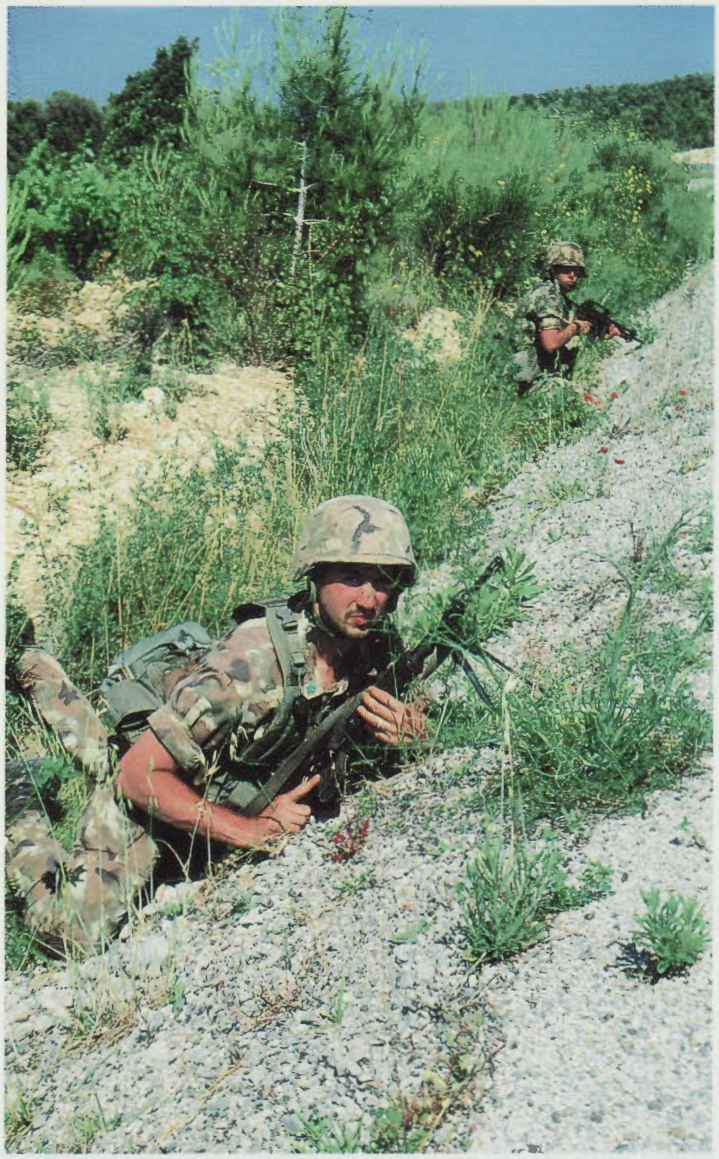
Stoic portrait of a San Marco Battalion Marine, cradling his Beretta SC70/90 5.56mm assault rifle.

As special ops elements secure the beachhead, San Marco Marines deploy from an LCU.

As the sun sets along the French coast, a San Marco Marine maintains a determined vigil over his force's beachhead.

In order to secure the push inland, San Marco Marines assemble a 120mm mortar for some heavy-duty fire-support.

A six-man squad of San Marco Marines prepares to probe "enemy" defenses during the opening days of "EOLE 98."



Emerging from the weeds with his weapon at the ready, a San Marco Marine reconnoiters an enemy position several miles in advance of the landing zone.

Having been deployed to Bosnia and Somalia, as well as years earlier, to Lebanon, the San Marco Marines are veterans of the dangerous cat-and-mouse game called "patrol."

Gently clutching his Beretta SC70/90, a San Marco Marine raises his head just enough to glance at an "enemy" patrol passing by at too close for comfort.

A San Marco squad gunner clutches his Belgian-produced FN Minimi 5.56mm light machine gun.

The Italians are known for their pomp, style and ceremony. Here, in the village square at Castres, Marines celebrate the third anniversary of the commissioning of EUROFOR.

The proud emblem of the San Marco Battalion—the St. Marco Lion of Venice.

The shoulder-patch of the Lagunari forces.

Italian Army Lagunari operators safeguard a junction from a perch atop some advantageous high-ground. Walkie-talkie communication is maintained with long-range reconnaissance elements in the field.

A Lagunari operator poses for the camera to display his indigenous-pattern BDU camouflage fatigues and camouflaged Kevlar body-armor.

After seizing a crossroad and securing the surrounding terrain, Lagunari operators permit Iveco 4x4s to proceed inland.

Once the terrain was secured by the Spanish and Italian Marines, French Marines from the 9th DIMa (Division d'Infantrie de Marine) *push ashore as part of the EUROFOR deployment. Here, on the French coast, are Roland SAMs belonging to the 54th RA* (Regiment d'Artillerie).

A 54th RA VAB, armed with a 20mm antiaircraft gun, provides close-air and ground defensive support to the Roland SAM battery.

Interesting photograph of a 2nd RIMa VAB—after service in Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans, many French combat vehicles are pre-camouflaged in a desert scheme.

Tank hunters of the 2nd RIMa (Regiment d'Infantrie de Marine) *deploy a Milan ATGW during an ambush exercise in "EOLE 98."*

A French Marine, from 2nd RIMa, mans his sniper's perch—armed with the FRF-2 7.5mm precision weapon.

French Marines peer through the sights of their FAMAS 5.56mm assault rifles at a forward staging point at the southern tier of the "EOLE 98" exercises.

An AMX-10 RC of the 1st RIMa engages "enemy" forces during "EOLE 98." Wheels and armor provide the 9th DIMa with enormous flexibility and protection. With the exception of the USMC 120mm cannon on the M1 Abrams, no other marine unit has access to the firepower and mobility of the 9th DIMa.

"EOLE 98" introduced, for the first time, the ASPIC light antiaircraft system—four Mistral antiaircraft missiles mounted on a Peugeot P-4 vehicle. The battery featured here belongs to the air defense detachment of the sprawling Istres Air Force Base. Note the Ares helmet worn by the commander of the vehicle.

An operator from the Commando de l'Air *poses for the camera during the unit's security detail around the EUROFOR command echelon and NATO dignitaries gathered for "EOLE 98." Airborne-qualified and commando trained, the operators from the* Commando de l'Air *are in charge of security at all French air bases and nuclear sites. Of interesting note is the operator's FAMAS assault rifle fitted with a M203 40mm grenade launcher.*

Pathfinders from the Spanish Airborne's elite Patrullas Reconocimiento Profuncidad, *or long-range reconnaissance patrol, deploy in a two-man strike team armed with their Barrett .50 caliber sniper's rifle.*

Spanish Airborne PRP snipers, legendary throughout Europe and NATO, add a lethal punch to the EUROFOR order of battle. Here, amid the thick brush of southern France, a two-man sniper and observer team prepare to move silently toward their target.

A two-man Commando de l'Air *ensure the security of the EUROFOR commanders during "EOLE 98."*

From a well-concealed communications centers, a Patrullas Reconocimiento Profuncidad *radio-operator sends a coded signal back to headquarters.*

With their "nylon hands of God" ferrying them safely to earth, Spanish paratroopers deploy with weapons at the ready.

Spanish paratroopers descend to earth courtesy of a Spanish Air Force C-130 during the airborne phase of "EOLE 98."

A Spanish paratrooper takes aim on the DZ with his Ameli 5.56mm light machine gun as he gets the drop on a target some 200 meters away.

Excellent close-up view of the Ameli 5.56mm light machine gun in action—in the capable hands of a Spanish paratrooper.

A two-man MG-3 7.62mm light-machine gun crew in action. The MG-3 remains the backbone of Spanish light infantry squad-support weapons. The MG-3 can be found with a tripod in support platoons of companies as well as in each section of paratroopers.

Spanish devils from the sky quickly assemble their platoon's short-barrel Experenza LN-M-86 81mm mortar for an immediate fire-support mission.

A Spanish paratrooper radios headquarters with the coordinates of his unit's fire-support requirements.

In one of the most exciting phases of "EOLE 98," a French company of paratroopers from the 9th RCP (Regiment de Chasseurs Parachutists) *leap from the heavens to reinforce their Spanish counterparts.*

Spanish Air Force Zappadores, or Forward Ground Controllers, monitor radio traffic between pathfinders and C-130 pilots as they supervise the jump on Castres airfield.

One of the French Air Force C-160 Transalls that ferry in a force of some 350 Portuguese paratroopers during the final leg of the attack on Castres airfield tasked with the mission to secure the landing zone.

The true essence of EUROFOR and of "EOLE 98": French and Portuguese paratroopers advance as a single unit inland toward the first of their many objectives.

A pathfinder from the Portuguese 2nd Airborne Battalion moves cautiously through the hedges near the outer perimeter at Castres airfield.

A Portuguese paratrooper, carrying a Galil assault rifle, participates in counter-insurgency operations in the latter phases of "EOLE 98."

Moving cautiously through an abandoned village that could be booby-trapped, or in the cross-hairs of an ambush, Portuguese paratroopers advance on a guerrilla stronghold.

After "liberating" a village from guerrilla bands and ethnic militiamen, two Portuguese paratroopers man a junction—Galil assault rifles in hand.

Ambush! Along a grassy road near Castres, Portuguese paratroopers come under fire from "enemy" militiamen.

Interesting photograph of the personal kit carried into battle by the Portuguese paratrooper. The Israeli-produced Galil assault rifle has been the staple of the Portuguese airborne for a long time and is considered a reliable and highly effective weapon.

Mounted on the rear of an Um-Alter vehicle, the Santa Barbara 40mm automatic grenade launcher provides mobile deployments of HQ and support units with a lethal ring of fire.

A heavy weapons specialist from the Portuguese 2nd Airborne Battalion's HQ and Support Company mans a Santa Barbara 40mm automatic grenade launcher. Each support company is equipped with eight grenade launchers.

EOLE (Aeolus): An Exercise Made to Order

"EOLE 98" took place in the western Mediterranean and in Languedoc-Roussillon. The exercise saw the formation of EUROMARFOR, the maritime element of EUROFOR, as well as five brigades drawn from the much talked-about national modules. In case of a crisis, each participating country furnishes module: module 1 of 1,000 men (national battalion), module 2 of 3,000 men (national brigade), module 3 of 10,000 men (national division). Under mandate of the ONU, the four participating countries form a coalition whose desire it is to supervise a peacekeeping operation in a fictitious country. Threatened by subversive elements, the peacekeeping force is deployed to evacuate western nationals and promote the transportation of humanitarian aid in a secure environment.

After "cleaning up" the coastal area of the threatened country – the area randomly mined without any plan for fear of the opposing country, the European fleet unloads a landing force on 8 June. The brigade of Italian Marines, which is composed of the San Marco Battalion, the Lagunari and the 2nd Battalion of the Spanish *Tercio de Armada*, after some difficulty manage to continue their mission: rescue 500 European nationals that were gathered together by their respective consuls at an evacuation center.

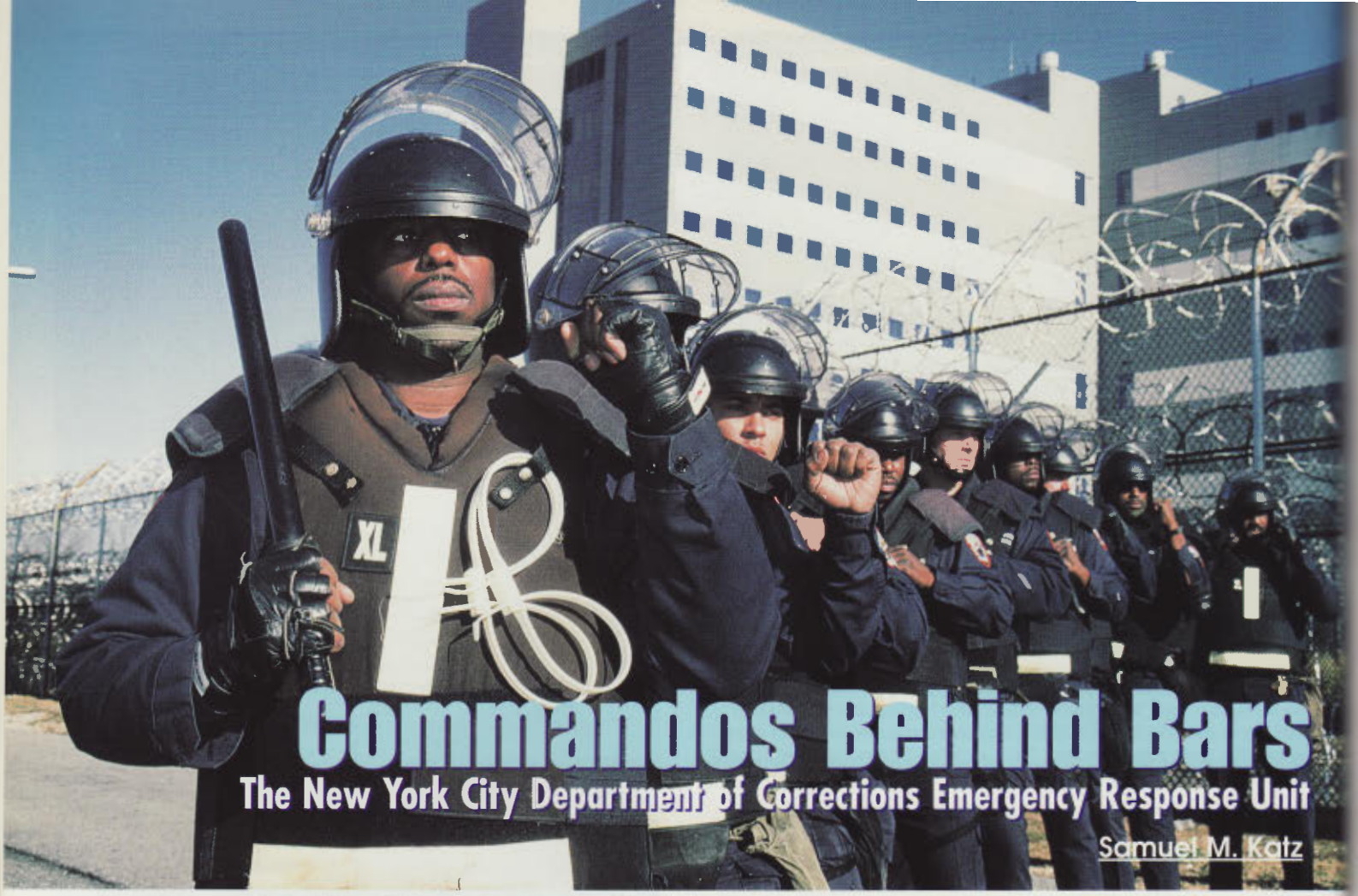
Farther to the west, a French combat group made up of the 9th DIMa (1st and 2nd RIMa, 6th RG and 11th RAMa) has disembarked and, after having subdued resistance, race in their VAB and AMX-10RC toward the north to hook up with the paratroopers.

These latter groups, represented by two battalions of the BRIPAC and a company of the 9th RCP, parachuted over various established landing zones at Castres. They are joined by 350 Portuguese paratroopers of the 2nd and 3rd Airborne Battalion, airlifted by the French Air Force over the Castres-Mazamet airport.

This is the moment when the balancing act takes place between EUROFOR's command post now operating at Castres and the command post of the forces aboard the Foudre. This command post will be noticeably protected by Hawk and Roland surface-to-air batteries, and by the Air Force's new P-4 Aspic Mistral.

Once the zone is secured, the Portuguese, Spanish and French paratroopers will take charge and watch over the refugee camps of Larzac, Castres and Brassac. For their part, the marines provide an escort for an important humanitarian convoy, while a CSAR (rescue) operation is launched by the air force to recover a downed pilot.

This realistic scenario has a sense of *déjà vu* to it in Europe, proof that reality is often more amazing than fiction, but also in Africa with Operation Pelican led by the French Army in the Congo. One can just as easily consider it as a final rehearsal for possible intervention in the Balkans in or around Kosovo.



Commandos Behind Bars

The New York City Department of Corrections Emergency Response Unit

Samuel M. Katz

Bold, brawny, and not about to take crap from anyone—ERU officers stand at the ready to respond to a prison yard disturbance. This is a view of the entry formation that will turn the meanest of jail-yard riots into a neat and orderly dispersal.

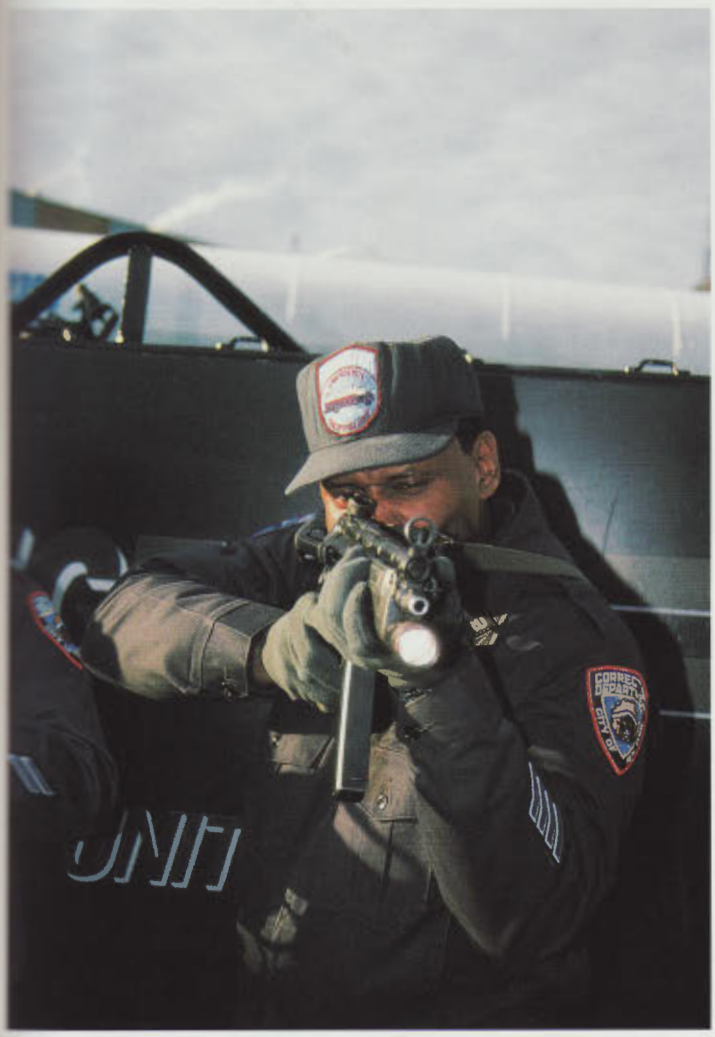
Morning has come to New York City with the typical brilliance and chill of the December's dawn. A bright orange sun has settled over the Manhattan skyline, as the reflection of light glistens toward the heavens. Morning is welcome to Manhattan and New York City, where the new day brings about the hustle-and-bustle of commerce, business and the comings and goings of nearly twelve million souls. In the choppy waters off the East River, however, on an island unlike any of the islands that dot the New York City landscape, morning is not a welcomed commodity. Here, a different light bounces off the morning's glow and off the skyline of endless rows of barbed wire concertina and razor wire. Morning means boredom, monotony, anger and rage. There are work details to join, stories to be concocted with public defenders and deals offered by detectives. Morning brings about the realization of captivity and the helplessness of being "in the system." It makes the weak cower that another endless day has begun, and it makes the angry violent. In a place where scores are settled over matters as serious as racial pride and issues as trivial as a stare, the potential for violence is explosive. One fist-fight, or throat slashed by an improvised razor made from a sharpened toothbrush, can lead to a full-scale conflagration where death, torture and the potential political fall-out from a tragic incident are inevitable end, hopefully, avoidable. Keeping the system running is a small army of officers who, on a daily basis, literally see and do it all. Keeping the pin in the grenade, however, falls to an elite unit of commandos behind bars who are on-call as an immediate response and resolution to the actions of the desperate and the incarcerated.

Welcome to the island, Riker's Island, and the precarious and often violent world of America's largest and toughest jail and the New York City Department of Corrections' Emergency Response Unit, the force of last resort that respond to danger in the single-most toughest precinct in a city known for tough and dangerous precincts. They are New York City's best kept secret.

Riker's Island is much more than New York City's principal jail facility. It is, in fact, a city. It is a thriving community of 17,000 inmates (residing on the rock at any given time), with 8,200 corrections officers that functions twenty-four-hours a day, every day of the year. Among the Riker's facilities are a jail for sentenced males, another for sentenced and detained females, and a detention center for adolescent males. Two floating detention centers are docked off the northern tip of Riker's Island, with each of the converted-ferry-turned-jails capable of housing over 160 inmates. Riker's Island possess a bakery, a central laundry, a tailor shop, a print shop, and even a power plant. The Department of Corrections also operates five borough facilities, sixteen court detention facilities and three hospital prison wards. The borough jails (one each in Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn and two in the Bronx) have a combined capacity of approximately 3,000 detainees on trial. The North Infirmary Command on Riker's Island houses detainees with less serious medical problems and persons with AIDS not requiring hospitalization, as well as high security inmates. There is even a harbor unit that patrols the waters around the island for any possible escapees struggling in the water, and a K-9 unit tasked with finding prisoners who managed to play Houdini and escape.

Those arrested in New York City and who cannot make bail while awaiting trial call Riker's Island home, as do petty thieves and criminals charged and convicted of crimes not worthy of a trip upstate to a penitentiary. There are murderers at Riker's, along with rapists, muggers, drug dealers, crack heads, whores, burglars, car thieves, psychos, perverts and others whose transgressions have admitted them into the city's thriving criminal justice system. Some of the city's most notorious criminals receive a cell at Riker's, as do some of the most anonymous and pitied souls. It is equal opportunity incarceration for those too dangerous to walk the city's streets and too poor to make bail. Over ninety-percent of the prison population is either black or Hispanic.

How it all begins on the mean streets of New York City—drug offenders enter the system once arrested by the NYPD.



An ERU officers peers through the sights of his Heckler and Koch MP5 9mm submachine gun.

Years ago, in a New York that seemed right of the movie Death Wish, Riker's Island was a volatile tinderbox where the inmates literally ran the asylum. Overcrowding was rampant, prison violence, from rapes to stabbings, was part of the landscape, and moral of the corrections officers was at an all time low. Riker's Island was so full, that new facilities, from cell-blocks to surplus Australian army tents, were constructed to meet the demand. In 1993, however, there was a new sheriff in town. Former federal prosecutor Rudolph Giuliani was elected mayor, and his primary objective was to reduce crime throughout the city. The 38,000 officers of the New York City Police Department (NYPD) were ordered to aggressively pursue criminals, clean up known high-

With their plexi-glass shields and wooden batons at the ready, a V-formation of ERU officers prepares to enter the "BING" compound.

crime areas, and to target trends in crime through highly-sophisticated computer-monitoring systems. And, that zealous approach to law enforcement wasn't restricted to the police department. A Department of Corrections dream team was set in place at Riker's Island to keep a lid on what had once been a volatile facility where stabbings, beatings and assaults were common place. Riots were not uncommon, as were what the inmates refer to as "uprisings." In 1990, for example, inmates seized a wing in the Correction Institute for Men (C-76) following a stabbing. They set up barricades, and set fire to their beds. Thirty correction officers and fifty inmates required emergency medical treatment in the conflagration. The situation was so precarious that emergency medical crews did not cross the Riker's Island Bridge, the only means onto the island, until they received heavily-armed police escorts.

Reducing violence inside the teeming facility, and throughout the city's other five detention facilities, was a primary objective of then Commissioner Michael P. Jacobson, and his new Chief of Department Eric Taylor, a swashbuckling former cop and a corrections officer who had risen up the chain of command, having seen Riker's at its absolute lowest points. Both Jacobson and Taylor realized that the DOC couldn't solve the city's crime problem, that was the job for the police, but they could implement revolutionary changes in how the island was run ensuring that violence, both inmate against inmate and inmate against correction officer, was drastically cut. Chief Taylor was a corrections department veteran who understood what it took to operate the largest municipal jail system in the country—consisting of sixteen jails and three hospital prison wards admitting more than 125,000 inmates annually, support facilities, a uniformed staff of approximately 11,380, and an annual budget of more than $775 million. Violence, Chief Taylor argued, was countered by proactive corrections officers, computerized databases for a smoother running of the system, and decisive and deterring shows of force. The unit summoned to the task was the Emergency Response Unit (ERU).

ERU officers pose next to their "Electric Stun Shield," currently under evaluation by the New York City Department of Corrections.

ERU Captain John Bello poses with his MP5 prior to leading a high-risk escort.

Every law enforcement and military formation has its elite - its all-volunteer squad of tactical and emergency service specialists who are called upon to perform tasks of rescue and response that others in the department are simply ill-equipped, and not trained, to execute. The New York City Police Department has its Emergency Service Unit (ESU), a force of 400 super cops tasked with everything from vehicle rescue to SWAT work and dignitary protection details. They, of course, operate in the precincts of the city where, over the course of their daily tasks, they come across both good people and bad. On Riker's Island, of course, known throughout the department as the city's toughest precinct, is a different world entirely, ERU faced an enormous challenge. Many in the facility are dangerous predicate felons who have rap sheets a mile long, and survive on the streets and inside the system through violence, reputation, and a razor-sharp shank they attempt to hide in their cells. Many in the facility are gang-members. Many are violent and mentally ill.

Chief Taylor's first objective was to increase the size of the unit from a mere handful of corrections department special operations specialists to a force of well over 100 officers trained and equipped to meet any challenge. Size counts! Inmates are impressed by nothing other than force, and being forced to square off against a platoon of muscle-bound men in flak jackets and armed with batons is too much for even the most hardened of Riker's regulars. "The inmates, many of whom have something to prove on the block will not think before striking a CO (corrections officer) or stabbing another inmate, but when they see us line up in formation, ready for any and all threats, they think twice about doing anything *other* than what we order them to do!" Yet attempting to

One of the ERU M113 armored personnel carriers.

An ERU M113 patrols the outer perimeter of the "BING," the maximum-security facility on the island where the worst of the worst are housed.

A New York City Department of Corrections THV stands at the ready for an emergency call-out at the Transportation Division garage.

An ERU fire-engine responds to a fire on the island.

decrease prison violence was no easy task. Riker's Island absorbs over 135,000 inmates a year. Prisoners move in and out of the system on a daily basis, and every day there are hundreds of visitors who enter the island to visit their clients, husbands and wives, children and fathers. Contraband, from drugs to improvised fake-vaginas, are always smuggled inside the facility. Yet the most dangerous type of contraband, the one that contributed most to prison violence, were weapons—from knives to razors, ice picks to even handguns. Remove the instruments of violence from the hands of the inmates, Chief Taylor and his wardens argued, and violence will decrease. ERU was ordered into the cell-blocks to clean out the house.

While weapons can be found in any of the island's ten jails, facility commanders, through sophisticated intelligence units, would often learn of a cell-block with a potential problem and then summon ERU. ERU searches are no ordinary look-see into a prisoner's cell. They are military-like operations of force and discipline designed to convince the inmates that resistance is futile, as well as to deter them from even thinking of hiding a weapon in the future. When ERU enters a jail, they do so marching two-by-two in impressive columns of muscle and Kevlar. Several officers, in their dark-blue fatigues are ready for anything they'll uncover inside the cell-block. Other officers, wearing protective helmets with plexi-glass visors and armed with clubs, move in for tactical support. The warden of the jail, wearing the white shirt of a supervisor and an expression of relief that ERU has come to clean house, directs the officers to a particular block where several inmates, awaiting trial for violent offenses, are believed to have hidden weapons. Marching through the cavernous corridors of the jail, ERU's search squad pounds the hard floor with the cadence of stomping boots. The inmates milling about the

Outside the "BING," a line of ERU officers prepares to enter a troublesome prison yard.

hallways, smoking commissary cigarettes and talking about life and deals on the outside, clear out of the way in a hurry. "Damn man," yells one with a cigarette dangling from his lips, "where's the war?"

The targeted cell-block is a multi-row tier painted in a fading sky blue. As the ERU officers assemble, the doors are opened and the inmates ordered to step aside as while the search commences. Every bit of the cell is "tossed." Books are checked, mattresses searched, and plumbing fixtures examined with a fine-tooth comb. Peering around edges and through cracks, the ERU officers use their flashlights to shed light on any potential blind-spot. Some contraband, regardless of how innocent, is found—including food and drinks absconded from the kitchen. A more important bounty is uncovered in the cell of a Hispanic inmate. A razor sharp shank, with an improvised rag-handle, is found among his personal effects. The officers know that one razor blade in one fight can result in a mini-riot, and they are relieved to have the device in custody. Yet they also know that inmates found with such contraband are subject to ninety-days of isolation, and many have resisted upon being cuffed and taken into custody again. Moments later, another shank is found—this one being an ice-pick sharpened to a lethal point from a discarded screwdriver. Both inmates claim that the makeshift weapons were needed for "their own protection," though the potential for having one of the devices end up in a corrections officer back makes these home-made bits of lethal weaponry ERU target number one.

The ingenuity that goes into most of the home-made weapons that ERU has uncovered ranges from bizarre to ingenious. Razors constructed from melted cigarette filters have been found, as have daggers fashioned from plexi-glass and metal slips from light fixtures. Screwdrivers are an island favorite, as are four-inch-long razors sharpened from brass railings. Wire have been twisted together to create deadly picks, and toothbrush handles have been melted, sanded and fine-tuned to produce skin-slicing razors. Pieces of paper have even been finely rolled up and hardened and sharpened to produce arrows; elastic from underwear

ERU officers engage in martial arts practice.

An ERU officer plays the role of "crazed-shank-wielding-murderer" while his immediate supervisor attempts to ward off the incoming blade during martial arts training.

Once the suspect is subdued and secured, an ERU team ferries him off to an isolation cell.

provides the material for the bow. "If the inmates would apply half the thought and brain-power to getting a job or righting their lives as they do to producing weapons here," claims one ERU officer, "these guys could be millionaire entrepreneurs!" Female prisoners, too, have a penchant for violence and weapon handling that has required ERU attention. The women can be as violent as the men, and are often less-impressed by a massive show of force by ERU.

The anti-violence initiative has been all-inclusive. Since 1994, prisoner searches have increased four-fold, to an average of nearly 8,000 a month. Violent offenders have been forced to wear red ID tags, and, perhaps most importantly, the department has created a gang-member database where aspects about every gang-member in the system is logged and studied. The gang-members in Riker's had, traditionally, run the institution. Members of the Latin Kings, New York's Puerto Rican gang heavily involved in narcotics trafficking in the New York area, had worn their rank beads in the system, and had marched on the orders of only their gang leaders, and conducted themselves behind bars solely at the instruction of the superiors. Chief Taylor's first objective was to forbid the wearing of the gang-colors in beads hats or any other articles of clothing. Recently, a new gang phenomena has become a staple of the Riker's Island landscape—the Los Angeles-based gag "The Bloods." Violent and heavily into the narcotics-trade, the "Bloods" began openly recruiting in the New York area and in Riker's Island.

In dealing with violent prisoners, ERU trains constantly in the apprehension, control and cuffing of the most difficult of inmates. Routinely, in the unit's training trailer located at the western corner of the island, the unit will play "aggressor" and "responder" roles. Supervisors, dressed as inmates, will enact the role of the troublesome inmate, while officers, in full protective gear, are tasked with subduing the unruly charge. "ERU ain't nothing mother fucker!" shouts some of the officers sitting at their desks and playing the role of other inmates attempting to add fuel to the frenzied fire of a disturbance, watching as the captain playing the inmate will be handled by a team of officers. The take-down is swift and violent. Everything is done to maintain the officer's safety when control of the prisoner is underway, and they are trained to subdue hands first, and then feet. A cuff team stands at the ready to secure the prisoner in as few moves as possible. As the training goes on, and the speed and might of the charging team grows in intensity, one of the supervisors tells the captain playing an inmate to drop his shank and assume the fetal position once the officers charge. The objective of the exercise is to see how the officers can control their own adrenaline and momentum, and minimize the use of force when it is not required. The majority of the men in ERU are muscle-bound and trained in practical martial arts.

Since the commencement of Chief Taylor's ERU-led violence-reduction strategy, violent incidents within the jails have been reduced to the lowest level in five years, a reduction rate that exceeds 50% in most jails. The reduction has been remarkable. In one ten-month period in 1994, there were a reported 497 stabbings and slashing at Riker's Island. During that same period in 1997, only eighty-two incidents were reported.

Even though violence has been radically reduced, the potential for a stabbing and the subsequent melee is very real, and part of the explosive electricity that permeates throughout the 415-acre island. One of ERU's

most important tasks is responding to a hostage-incident where prisoners have barricaded themselves inside a block and are holding inmates and, most importantly, corrections officer hostages. Prison riots and hostage-taking incidents are a brutal phenomena of rage, violence and vengeance. Corrections officers seized are often beaten, sexually abused and tortured. Urine and feces are often rubbed into their eyes, and the uncontrolled savagery of rage unchecked is a brutal display. Unlike police hostage-rescue teams, a prison response unit is often handicapped by having little negotiating room with the captive-takers. The inmate is already in the system, he has probably tortured an officer with lustful violence, and he has committed several dozen felonious crimes in the process of taking the hostages. Some of the inmates are desperate and withdrawing from drugs. In any hostage-taking incident inside Riker's, time is a dwindling commodity. As a result, ERU officers are trained to be negotiators as well as commandos. Tactically, there is very little that this superbly-trained force cannot do. They are armed with Heckler and Koch MP5 and Colt 9mm submachine guns, M-16A2 and Colt 727 5.56mm assault rifles, Benelli and Ithaca 37 12-gauge shotguns, and Glock 9mm pistols (equipped with laser aiming devices). The unit is equipped with Hurst hydraulic spreader and cutter tools for entry into barricaded positions behind bars, and unit officers are trained in a myriad of fast-rope and rappel techniques. ERU, in several exercises, has trained in deploying from helicopters with the United States military. The unit is trained in deploying chemical agents to both subdue violent inmates, as well as flush them out of barricaded positions. ERU also deploys a sniper team, armed with the Remington M-24 7.62mm system. In fact, one of ERU's snipers recently qualified first-place in the city, beating out officers from the NYPD's Emergency Service Unit counter-sniper team in sharp-shooting skill.

With his CAR-15 5.56mm assault rifle at the ready, an ERU officer covers an entry team as they enter a jail-house yard full of rioting prisoners.

An ERU "CAT" (Counter Assault Team) squad deploys tactically during escort training on the western banks of Riker's Island.

ERU is also the sole New York City law enforcement entity that regularly trains in hostage-rescue operations on board buses. The Department of Corrections possesses an impressive fleet of 412 vehicles, and the Transportation Division logs over two-million miles a year transporting two-and-a-half million riders (inmates, staff and visitors). Besides moving inmates to and from courts, the department transports inmates to and from hospitals, felony-sentenced inmates to state prisons, and other miscellaneous runs. Even though tight security is maintained on all routes, the potential for an escape gone-bad ending with a hostage-taking ordeal is a very real scenario. Just as in the assault of a barricaded cell-block, speed and firepower are the secrets of success in a bus assault. Using ladders, diversionary devices, and sniper-initiated assaults, officers are trained to decisively and effectively gain access to the besieged vehicle, and then rescue all hostages and eliminate any threats in one fast swoop of firepower and speed.

Another of the unit's primary tactical assignments is escorting high-risk prisoners to and from court, medical treatment and trips north of the city to State penitentiaries. The who's who of the New York's crime scene passes through Riker's Island, from indigent pickpockets, to men and women of means and authority. High-risk prisoners include mass-murders and serial killers, Mafia chiefs and hired guns, terrorists and gang-leaders, and even criminals whose crime might be so notorious and despicable, that there is a definite need to protect the prisoner from harm coming from either fellow inmates or a victim seeking personal vengeance. Clearly, criminals who might escape or be set free pose the greatest risk to the ERU escorts. The objective of each high-risk run is simple—keep the subject in custody and safely to his next destination *without incident.* As a result ERU escorts resemble mini-presidential motorcades, complete with heavily armed officers in a CAT (counter-attack) ready to respond in a hail of ballistic muscle to any threat. On some runs, especially those to and from courts, advance teams will check out security and position counter-snipers on roof-tops. If an inmate manages to escape from a court holding pen or a hospital ward, it is ERU's task to hunt them down and bring them back to Riker's. On Medal Day 1997 for the New York City Department of Corrections, ERU officers received commendations of valor for their role in transporting gang-members from the "Wild Cowboys" drug gang to and from trial in Brooklyn. There isn't a tactical situation on—or off—the island that the unit cannot handle.

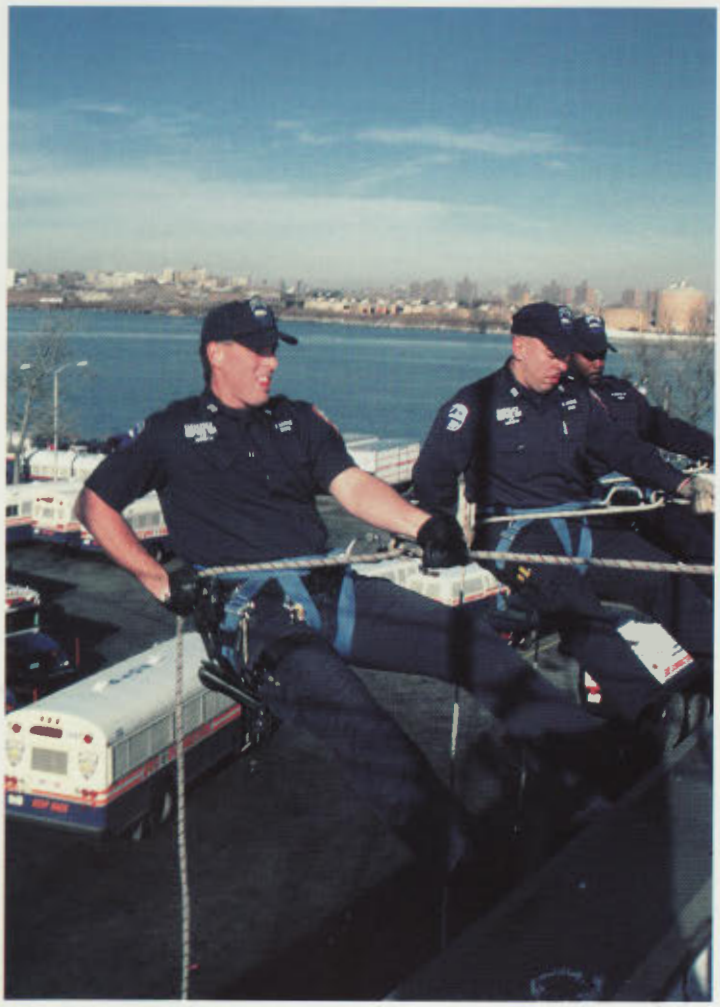
Close-up view of an ERU tactical team. Note patrol vehicles in the background—the mainstay of the ERU fleet. These vehicles are used for routine operations on Riker's Island, as well as on high-risk prisoner escort duty.

Many in the Emergency Response Unit liken Chief Taylor to General George S. Patton, and, indeed, the unit was transformed from a small tactical response team into the elite of the department under his three years as department head. Chief Taylor made a priority of obtaining and top-of-the-line and military surplus equipment so that ERU could successfully accomplish its missions. One of the most unique pieces of equipment currently in the ERU arsenal are four armored personnel carriers, including two former U.S. military M113s. While no one in ERU expects to fight a war in the near future, the armor is a vital piece of deterrence. "Walk tall and carry a big stick," jokes one officer maintaining one of the M113s, painted in a stealth-like black scheme, "you can get more peaceful cooperation with the show of might than you can by swinging a hundred night-sticks." In case of a large-scale disturbance in one of the many exercise yards on the island, the M113s cannot only provide safe and mobile cover for the responding officers, but it is such a demonstrative show of force that few inmates, even hard-core gang-members, would want to go up against it. "Force doesn't always have to be used to be a deterrent," claimed Chief Taylor, "sometimes it only has to be seen." Few officers in ERU argue. Nothing, in their mind, can disperse a yard full of uncooperative inmates faster than an APC! Just in case the sight of oncoming armor does not convince the rioting inmates that resistance is ill-advised, the unit possesses South Korean-made automatic 12-gauge shotguns that, when fired into the ground in front of rioting prisoners, will kick-up enough dirt and debris to convince even the most violent offender that the time has come to head back to his cell. Chemical agents are also deployed in such scenarios.

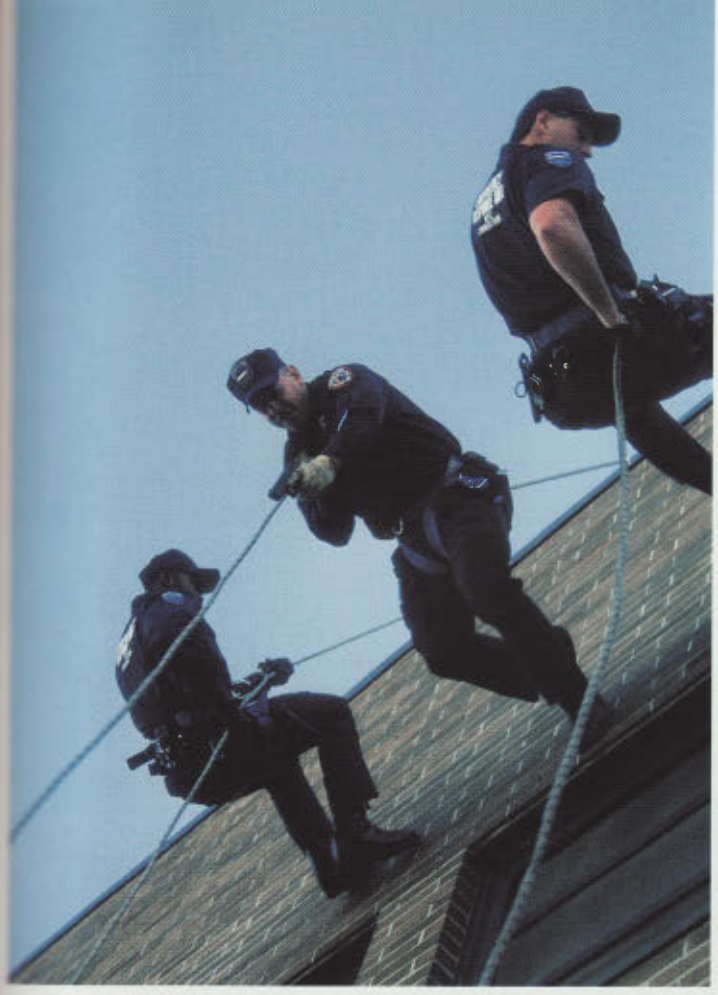
Another unique tool in the department's, and ERU's, arsenal is the THV—a mobile home converted to a tactical headquarters vehicle—designed and built by DOC officers. Equipped with radios, cellular communications, computers and fax links, the THV is a mobile command station that follows ERU on most of its major assignments—both on and off the island. ERU is currently fielding a program where it will acquire several ambulances and become a first-responder force to most major medical emergencies on the island.

There is a unique esprit de corps among the officers in the unit—one of motivation and dedication. A completely volunteer force, hopefuls must first pass an oral and then physical examination to see if he is ERU material. The selection process is grueling, and the work demanding. Yet being part of an elite team is reward enough for many in the unit, and it shows in the innovative and charged spirit they bring with to work ever day. And, perhaps, that esprit de corps stems from the fact that ERU is not just a prison's emergency reaction team—it is the sole unit on the island trained, equipped and ready to respond to any disaster—from a fire to an airplane crash, from a gas leak to even a prison bus overturning. Warden David Schoenfeld, the commanding officer of the Department of Corrections' Special Operations Division, an innovative and veteran officer, has pioneered a program where ERU and the Special Operations Division have become an integral element of the city's emergency management plan, assisting the city in case of disasters—both natural and man-made. All ERU officers are SCUBA-qualified and EMTs. Because Riker's Island is so close to the take-off and landing runways at LaGuardia Airport, the unit has, in recent years, been deployed to the icy waters of Flushing Bay to rescue survivors from plane crashes. A plane, did, in fact, crash on the island in 1958. ERU even maintains its own fire-truck, and even airport-disaster emergency vehicle and equipment.

It is early morning on a brilliant winter's morning, and the winds off the East River are harsh and unforgiving. At one end of the western portion of the island, just outside the North Infirmary Command, known as the "BING," some of the island's most dangerous offenders watch as a few dozen men in riot gear practice a V-formation. The inmates, in isolation for violence infractions, stare out their small windows and yell,



Atop the SOD HQ, ERU officers hone their rappel skills for that next time they'll be tasked upon to rescue a tier seized by rioting inmates.



During hostage-rescue training, an ERU rope-master aims his Glock automatic at a potential target.

"ERU ain't nothing but a bunch of punk-ass mother-fuckers," as the men perfect the formation until it is a well-choreographed tool of dispersing an unruly prison yard. Shields are raised, batons clutched and helmets fastened tightly to faces determined to show who truly owns the yard. Nearby, another group of ERU officers are checking their M16 assault rifles and MP5 submachine guns, as they prepare to run a high-risk escort from Staten Island to an upstate penitentiary. The prisoner they'll be transporting is a high-ranking organized crime figure, and intelligence has learned that an escape attempt is planned. Nothing will be left to chance. Kevlar assault vests are worn, as are Fritz helmets. Shotguns are carried, as well. Later in the day, a different team of ERU officers will

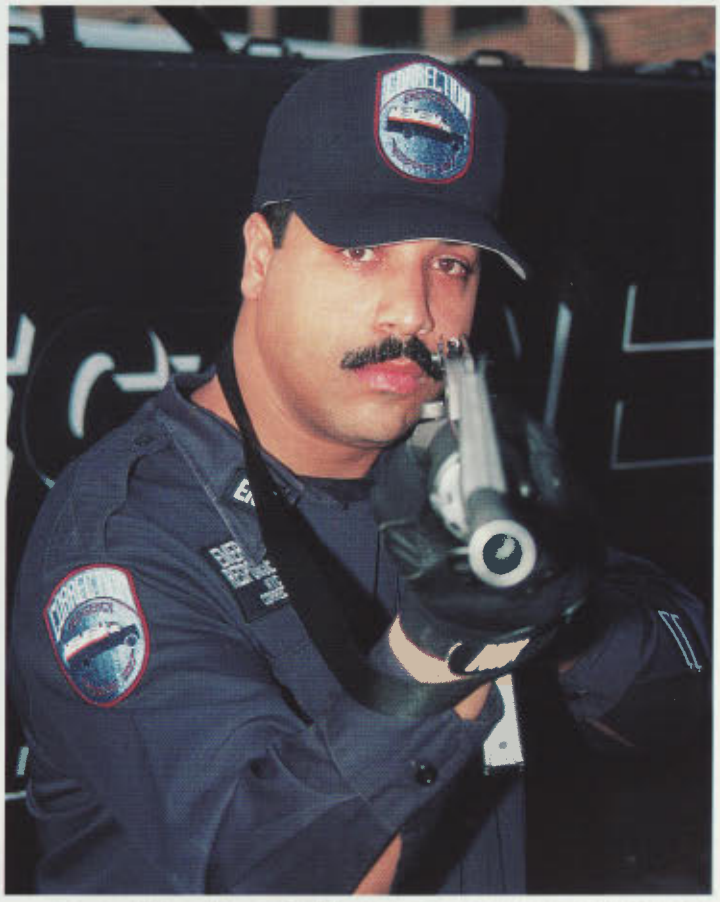
Following an ERU search, NYDOC Gang Intelligence Unit officers remove a prisoner found with a weapon for arrest proceedings in the Bronx.

As officers prepare to enter an outer-perimeter where inmates are rioting, an ERU officer displays the business-end of his 12-gauge shotgun.

conduct a sweep of two cell-blocks on the island, in search of shanks and drugs and other miscellaneous bits of contraband.

For ERU, New York City's best kept secret, it is just another day at the office. One of the most explosive, dangerous, and volatile offices in the world!

Footnote: As a result of the unit's increased role in emergency operations on Riker's Island, and as a result of their increased work-load on the New York criminal justice scene, the unit was recently upgraded and expanded, and will soon be renamed "The Emergency Service Unit."



The business-end of an ERU CAR-15 5.56mm assault rifle. The CAR-15 is a mainstay in the unit, and used by the unit's counter-sniper/observer team; that team, it should be noted, recently scored higher than the NYPD's Emergency Service Unit team during accuracy competitions.

With ERU acting as tactical back-up, Gang Intelligence Unit officers question a prisoner inside his cell during a large-scale search.

Moving slowly and methodically throughout the line, a CAT team prepares to gain access to a besieged part of the island.

An ERU CAT team trains in responding to an armed assault on their convoy.

The Lions of Italy
The San Marco Battalion

Alberto Scarpitta

A San Marco antitank squad in Bosnia poses for the camera. Note the Army pattern Gore-tex smock worn over the typical San Marco battle dress fatigues.

Dawn was about to break over the Mediterranean, as the blackened water glistened like liquid velvet at the first glimmers of light emerging from the east. Along the Sicilian coast, where the sands appear like purple jewels in the early morning glow, the only sound heard was the roar of the sea and the crash of the waves. Suddenly, and without warning, ear-splitting thunder resonated along the beach. The flickering flash of light in the distance turned into fireballs on the coast. Thick plumes of debris and smoke engulfed the carved frontier of the sandy shore. Hell had come calling.

Amid the incoming artillery, the darkness and the surf, a small trail of landing craft raced toward shore. Their speed was incessant and their target select. As the small landing-craft flotilla headed toward an inlet, almost within range of the defender's guns, it disappeared in a blinding cloud of purple smoke. The defenders unleashed directed fire at what they thought was the incoming invasion, but the diversionary smoke grenades had concealed the arrival with great success. Before the defenders could react, or repel, the landing craft had reached the sandy shore, and dozens of men, wearing their BDU fatigues, raced inland firing their SC-70/90 5.56mm assault rifles. Before the defenders could retreat, they were overwhelmed and surrounded. The Lions of Italy had struck once again!

Italy's military obsession with naval operation dates back to ancient times and the Roman armadas that owned the riptides of the Mediterranean. The origin of the "*Raggruppamento San Marco*," the Italian Navy amphibious force, dates back to 1713, when King Vittorio Amedeo II established the regiment "*La Marina*," which included the sailors of the naval fleet. The regimental objective was to create landing parties on board warships in order to carry out guard duty and other operations on land. Shipborne landing troops were involved in many naval campaigns during the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, and performed exceptionally well in China, during the bloody Boxer rebellion.

During World War I, amphibious troops were involved mainly in land operations during the fierce battles waged by Italy's troops. A regiment of three battalions, later raised to five, fought in the trenches defending Venice, as the city was attacked, from sea and land, by the Austrians. In fact, the current designation of the unit is derived from that defense of Venice, as the grateful city offered to the Marina Regiment the badge with the winged lion and the name of her patron saint, San Marco. In 1919 the regiment was reduced to battalion level and saw limited action in China, with troops of other foreign powers, and then, of course, in the 1935-36 Italian campaign in Ethiopia.

At the beginning of World War II the San Marco Regiment consisted of two battalions, the *Bafile* and the *Grado*. A marine parachute battalion, and a battalion of frogmen were added later to augment the regiment's amphibious and special operations abilities. Gradually the strength was increased to seven battalions.

Despite its specialized amphibious training, the unit was employed as general infantry in North Africa, suffering heavy losses at the hands of Allied troops in conventional land battles they were not trained to fight. Nevertheless, the unit remained a proud and cohesive force. When the Axis troops in those regions surrendered, the San Marco flag was the last one to be lowered in Tunisia, in 1943.

After the armistice between Italy and the Allies the unit was reconstituted and fought against the Germans on the Cassino front and,

During a training mission on the Sicilian coast, a San Marco marine peers through the sites of his assault rifle.

A force of laden down marines, wearing the "desert" pattern camouflage fatigues worn recently in Somalia, deploys from the rear of an armored personnel carrier.

A San Marco sniper, considered among the finest marksmen in Italy, displays his prowess with the Accuracy International .338 Lapua Magnum.

with the British Eighth Army, on the Adriatic front with the regiment receiving accolades and honors by the Allies for their courage under fire and combat skill. In fact, the regiment was gradually rebuilt and a new special forces battalion, consisting of paratroopers and frogmen, was given the honor to be the first to enter into the newly-liberated city of Venice.

In the years immediately following the end of the war, along with the general streamlining of the Italian Armed Forces according to the Peace Treaty, the San Marco Regiment was reduced to battalion-strength and deemed an inter-service amphibious force under the command and control of the Italian Army. This brigade also encompassed the "*Lagunari*," amphibious troops belonging to the Army operating in the lagoon of Venice. In 1959 San Marco Battalion was disbanded.

On January 1, 1965, after careful reexamination of its regional and strategic requirements, the Italian Navy decided to restructure her amphibious branch, which came under the 3rd Naval Division in Brindisi, in the southern part of the country, on the Adriatic Sea. Officers and non-commissioned officers for this new unit were drawn from both the Army and the Navy, while the lower ranks were selected solely from Navy draftees.

In the seventies the battalion consisted of a command company, two assault companies, a fire support company and landing support units, with a company usually always at sea in transport vessels specially designed for amphibious operations. In the early 1980s, the unit was reorganized and divided into three branches: the Operational, Logistics and Training Groups. The Operational Group consisted of a command

This Recon/DOA sniper uses the 7.62mm Accuracy International Cover, the silenced version of the sniping rifle.

A special forces platoon operator, formerly called Recon/DOA, poses for the camera to display his "desert" uniform, Boonie hat, and a favorite of the Italian military elite, the Beretta Model 12S 9mm submachine gun.

element, one assault and one support company, with a total of around 350 marines. In 1992 a second assault company was added to the force with the ever-increasing strategic importance of the Mediterranean made necessary a further growth.

THE RAGGRUPPAMENTO SAN MARCO TODAY

The collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the complete realignment of the global strategic alliances and threats have forced European strategists to refocus the missions, equipment and operational assignments of its armed forces—especially those units that are special operations capable. Multinational reaction forces, within the context of combined joint operations, have become the means by which smaller nations have responded to once peaceful regions now beset by ethnic complexities and cross-border threats. The maritime dimension to this equation has gained in importance as a result of the inherent flexibility of naval forces to deploy large numbers of men and material to a crisis area in a relatively short period of time whenever regional security is threatened. This is even more true in the Mediterranean region, where risks and instability, caused by economic, social and political unrest were higher than anywhere else on the continent.

The Italian Navy has traditionally played a key role in securing the Mediterranean. During the Cold War it contributed to the stability of the region and those adjacent to it. It was a fully supporting and effective component of NATO's defense within the contest of the truly integrated military structure. In the New World Order, the Italian Navy's role has increased to safeguarding the southern tier of NATO's interests. Italian Navy operations have included peace-keeping stints in Lebanon, Sinai, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and, in combat and emergency relief operations in Somalia, Albania and the Adriatic and Balkans.

At least one SC70/90 assault rifle in each squad is equipped with an M203 40mm grenade launcher, as seen here by this San Marco marine taking aim on a training field in southern Spain.

A San Marco Battalion antitank team takes aim with a Milan ATGW fitted with Galileo thermal imaging chamber.

Two old, but reliable and powerful, weapons: the M-2 Browning 12.7mm and MG-42/59 7.62mm machine guns, still used by the battalion though mainly as squad support weapons mounted on a light vehicle.

The Italian Navy has always given great importance in coherently adapting its forces, with thorough review of posture, so that its capabilities are tailored to meet the requirement and challenges of the new scenario and missions demand. From this point of view Italian Navy has developed an amphibious component forged by a high-level of professionalism that has increased markedly in size even when financial resources devoted to naval operations are continuously decreasing.

The San Marco Battalion became part of the "*Raggruppamento Anfibio San Marco*" in 1995. The Raggruppamento (a regimental-sized group) is a landing force of about 2,000 marines belonging to the Amphibious Force Command (3rd Naval Division). It is composed of a Command Element, the School Group, the Logistics Group and the San Marco Battalion, the operational component of about 1,000 marines, all of whom are career soldiers or long service volunteers.

The Command Element, led by a naval captain, performs command and control duties, operations training planning and administrative tasks. The Raggruppamento has complete training autonomy thanks to its School Group, which undertakes recruit training and special courses for specialists, officers and NCOs. The Logistics Group is responsible for garrison support, equipment maintenance and general administration.

Early morning target practice with a company's 81mm mortar. The medium mortar platoon consists of four mortar squads.

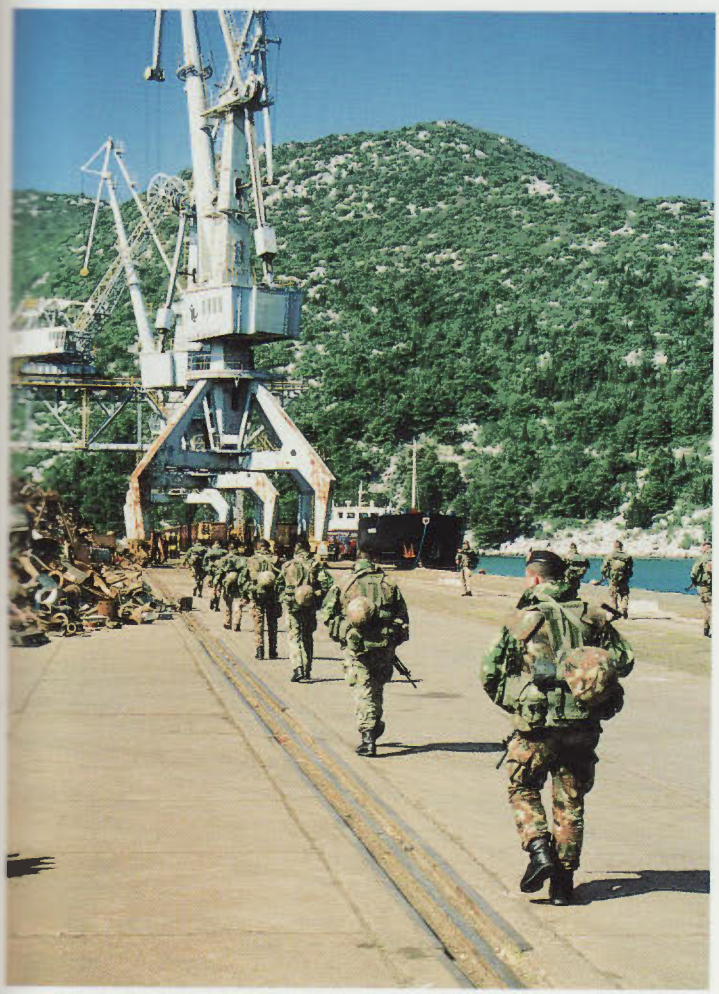
The 120mm heavy mortar is available for greater range fire support.

Moving silently, and quickly, around an enemy position during multinational level training, an Italian marine antitank squad marches into position.

THE SAN MARCO BATTALION

The San Marco Battalion, commanded by a naval captain as well, consists of a command unit, three assault companies, one support weapons company and one naval operations company. The command unit is a large reinforced company, including both combat and logistical sub-units:

- Battalion Headquarters and its usual staff sections.
- Fire Support Coordination Center, directing the aviation and naval artillery support with teams of FAC (Forward Air Controllers) and NOTCC (the Italian-acronym for Observation Nucleus for Anti-Shore Naval Gunfire) which are attached to the different combat companies.



San Marco Battalion troopers secure the Croatian port of Ploce during a deployment to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Stoic portrait of a machine-gunner in the midst of the twenty-four week amphibious warfare course.

- Special Forces Platoon, consisting of two sections of long-range reconnaissance units formed with elements coming from the COMSUBIN naval-commandos, and two sections of DOA, "*Demolitori Ostacoli Antibarco,*" or obstacle clearance divers who clear mines and neutralize underwater obstacles and threats to the landing force. The Special Forces missions are primarily long-range reconnaissance, preventive reconnaissance of landing areas and beachheads, intelligence-gathering, deep-penetration surveillance, raids and acts of sabotage. Night action specialists, Recon/DOA teams are infiltrated before the main assault through submarines, airdrops or helicopters, and reach their objectives either underwater with closed-circuit breathing apparatus designed for clandestine operations, or using Zodiac-type inflatable boats, some of which are self-inflatable and can be air-dropped. Special Forces armament

In Bosnia, San Marco marines stand guard at a SFOR camp near Moshtar.

includes the Heckler and Koch MP-5 submachine gun family, especially the MP-5SD3 silenced version, while snipers use the Accuracy International .338 caliber Lapua Magnum and the .308 silenced variant. For heavy-duty sniping assignments, when a .308 round just won't due, the special forces teams use the McMillan .50 caliber precision rifle with devastating results.

- Signals Platoon, which enables the battalion staff to perform command and control functions, maintains links with the higher command and subordinate units through the use of different HF and VHF radio communications systems and Satcom terminals.
- Logistic Platoon ensures a full logistical autonomy to the battalion, resupplying food, fuel and ammunitions.
- Sanitary Section, furnishing first line medical facilities pending casualty evacuation.
- Transports Company, groups all the wheeled and tracked vehicles of the battalion and their drivers. It provides also first line repair and maintenance of vehicles and weapon systems. The company enables the battalion to operate as a motorized force using the Iveco VM-90 light trucks or as a mechanized one, thanks to the VCC-1 tracked APCs, an improved version of the American M-113. Ten LVTP-7 amphibious tracked vehicles provide the battalion with a reliable, albeit slow, means of transportation from the mother ship to a hotly contested beachhead.

THE COMPANIES

Each of the three assault companies includes one command, three assault and one support platoons. The command platoon consists of five squads: command; service; scout; and, two combat engineer squads. The thirty-seven men assault platoons include, besides the commander and the radioman, three rifle squads of eight-men and one light weapons squad of eleven marines. The assault squads use the SC-70/90 5.56mm assault rifles with folding stock, one Minimi light machine gun and at least one 40mm M203 grenade launcher fitted to an assault rifle.

The Light Weapon squad operates two old, but reliable, MG-42/59 7.62mm light machine guns and two Dynamit Nobel Panzerfaust 3 antitank rocket-launchers.

For additional antitank stopping power, the Instalaza C90 is also deployed by forward troops.

The support platoon has two squads—the first one is equipped with two M-2 Browning 12.7mm heavy machine-guns, while the second one fields up to four antitank Milan launchers, or a mixed punch of Milan and Panzerfaust 3s. The support weapons company consists of one 120mm mortar platoon with three mortar squads; one 81mm mortar platoon with four weapons and one antitank platoon with three squads of two Milan batteries each, and one air-defense squad armed with Stinger shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles. The 81mm mortars are carried by hand and supply invaluable fire-support. The 120mm mortar platoon provides the force with greater offensive range, and represents a veritable piece of artillery in the hands of the battalion commander.

The range of night vision equipment available to the force is extensive. Besides the Galileo thermal imaging chambers for the Milan ATGWs, each combat company uses a large quantity of light-intensification binoculars, night vision goggles and LI optical devices that can be applied to rocket launchers, machine-guns and individual rifles.

A new unit recently added to the battalion is the Naval Operations Company, that includes multiple eight and ten man teams specialized in the ship-boarding operations during maritime blockades, such as the United Nations embargo on Iraq during the 1990-91 Gulf War.

During a patrol along the coast in the Italian sector of SFOR in Bosnia, a VCC-1 and its crew maintains a stoic vigil.

A San Marco marine in southern France during EOLE '98 EUROFOR/EUROMARFOR exercises.

During urban-warfare exercises, a young marine lieutenant summons his radioman for a dispatch to headquarters.

The Italian Army Lagunari amphibious regiment closely cooperates with the Raggruppamento San Marco. At least one company of Lagunari is often attached to the battalion.

MISSIONS

The Raggruppamento San Marco is a highly flexible and innovative force, capable of projecting considerable assets ashore, supported by fire support and long-range supply capabilities. As a result, its operational missions include:

- Amphibious landing operations.
- Surprise attacks and large-scale raids and incursions.
- Multinational deployments.
- Peace-keeping and humanitarian support operation.
- Non-Combatant Evacuations missions (NEO) and logistic support to hostage rescue missions.

To transport and land the amphibious group the Italian Navy's 3rd Naval Division has three LPDs of the San Giorgio and San Giusto class of transport and landing ships; plus the "*Gruppo Mezzi da Sbarco*," or Landing Craft Group, with fast MDNs, hydrojet powered landing craft capable of transporting troops (thirty- men) or reconnaissance vehicles at more than twenty-knots. The group now has fifty new fiberglass fast attack craft, powered by a ninety horse-power outboard motor which can carry eight fully equipped men at thirty-two knots over long distances.

The introduction of the helicopter greatly enhances the flexibility of a seaborne assault and an amphibious operation can be conducted by helicopters, surface crafts or a combination of both. The *Nucleo Lotta Anfibia* is a small helicopter unit with six SH-3D transport and six AB-212 utility/light support helicopters under the operational command of the landing force. The aerial element can support the San Marco Battalion transporting up to a company in a single wave. Its capabilities will improve with four new EH-101 helicopters in the utility version that will be assigned to the unit.

The new landing crafts, assault boats and helicopters will permit the development of a long-range assault concept, getting the battalion ready for amphibious operations launched from longer distance from the shore, out of radar and artillery range. The San Marco Battalion aims to acquire the capability of landing one assault company with the fast boats and a second one by the helicopters. The third assault company and the support company will follow the landing crafts and operate as a mechanized combat team with the VCC-1 APCs or as a motorized force thanks to Iveco's all terrain VM-90 light vehicles.

TRAINING

About eighty percent of the men in the San Marco Battalion are professional soldiers and volunteers serving for three years or more. The remaining marines are conscripts employed in base support duties and logistical tasks in messes, circles, offices and depots.

Italian and Spanish marine officers confer during joint-exercises.

The combined Spanish-Italian Amphibious Force will have assets, like this Scorpion light tank, that the current San Marco Battalion order of battle lacks.

Iveco VM-90 light vehicles disembark from a MEN medium landing craft.

The Iveco VM-90 light truck and its different versions should be replaced in the future by a new tactical vehicle offering excellent off-road capabilities and great versatility in the modular fitting of the different configurations.

A communications shelter belonging to the command element of the amphibious group.

The volunteers receive their basic training at the Maricentro in Taranto, where they spend four weeks of intense instruction. They are then assigned to the School Group of the Raggruppamento in Brindisi, for a first four-weeks initial training and selection course. This phase emphasizes agility and stamina, with the overcoming of commando courses and marching over increasing distances. Determination, flexibility, speed of invention and efficiency are essential requirements. Successful aspirants then undertake a twelve weeks specialist training giving a specialist qualification: rifleman, mortar specialist, assault engineer, and scout. At the end of this phase the volunteers must pass a final examination testing the individual skills. The selection process is quite tough and a large proportion of applicants is rejected. Those who do qualify receive their black berets and continue training for a further eight-weeks advanced course that includes squad and platoon actions, patrol and combat tactics, combat in built up areas and amphibious operations training. The frequent deployments abroad provide incomparable opportunities for training experience.

DOA personnel trains at Verignano base near La Spezia, home base of the famous COMSUBIN, the Italian combat diver force. All San Marco officers and NCOs attend an Amphibious Qualification Course of twenty-four weeks before being assigned to the units. A few are former COMSUBIN naval commandos.

THE SHIPS

Until recently the San Marco's amphibious capabilities were

San Marco units landing with the fast assault boats are provided with a new Gore-tex water-tight black uniform worn over the usual battle dress.

The fiberglass fast assault boats can travel at more than thirty-knots with up to eight fully-equipped troops. Light, fast and maneuverable, these crafts are ideal for commando operations.

The Italian coast is beautiful but treacherous, and San Marco Battalion operators must learn to negotiate the jagged lagoons if they are to survive actual operations.

Special forces platoon's troops explore a possible landing beach to calculate its gradient and ability to support tracked vehicles. Beach reconnaissance and intelligence-gathering missions are primarily conducted at night.

severely limited by the lack of available shipping earmarked for amphibious use. The new San Giorgio, San Marco and San Giusto Landing Platform Docks (LPDs) have improved the situations immeasurably. The two units of the San Giorgio class and the San Giusto are amphibious ships equipped with a floodable dock allowing the movement of medium landing crafts. These interesting LPDs have a wide flight deck suitable for medium and heavy attack and transport helicopters landing on extensive roll-on roll-off facilities. Furthermore, three small, but very fast, landing crafts are placed on the side of the flight deck and are lowered at sea by cranes. The ships can accommodate about 350 troops, thirty-six tracked vehicles (VCC-1 and LVTP-7) and other wheeled vehicles no heavier than a ton.

The advanced logistic features and the large hospital facilities allow the ships an ample flexibility of employment, ranging from simple troop transport, to emergency evacuation and rescue missions, to classical raids and amphibious assault. San Giusto has improved capability in accommodations and telecommunications in order to act as a landing operations command platform and is also designated to operate as training ship for the second class trainees of the Naval Academy.

FOREIGN LINKS

Italy is a member of NATO and WEU (Western European Union), and the majority of military operations are conducted in concert with the forces of allied states. Beside the traditional cooperation with the U.S.

San Marco marines make contact with the ice-cold waters of the Mediterranean during an international exercise. The speed with which the operation is carried out and the coordination of movements even in difficult conditions are the result of arduous training.

An ambulance leaves the simulated battlefield courtesy of a landing craft during an international marine exercise in southern France.

Having penetrated inland, the LVTP-7 tracked amphibious vehicles have carried out their basic function of ferrying the troops to shore. With a top speed of seven knots, the LVTP-7 is regarded as far too slow as a delivery vehicle for modern beach assaults.

The LPD of the San Giorgio class. The Italian Navy's new multi-function ship will vastly improved amphibious capacities, greatly expanding the capabilities and range of the San Marco Battalion.

Marines Corps, the Raggruppamento San Marco has strong ties with similar units of other Mediterranean nations, including France, Italy, Spain and Portugal. In 1995 the San Marco Battalion became the lynchpin of the European Marine Force (EUROMARFOR), formed as a means by which the European Union could establish a southern-tier rapid deployment force capable of moving into the cross-hairs of a hot-spot in the region at a moment's notice. The San Marco Battalion may be assigned to this force for any specific operation. The unit is also a member of the proposed brigade-sized Spanish-Italian Amphibious Force (SIAF), scheduled to become operational in 1999. The commands of SIAF and SILF (Spanish-Italian Landing Force) will shift each year from one country to the other. On the Italian side the SIAF headquarters will be provided by the 3rd Naval Division, while the Commander Landing Force (CLF), commander of the SILF, will be the commanding officer of the Raggruppamento San Marco, now a naval-captain but probably a rear admiral in the near future. Officers and non-commissioned officers are being exchanged to ensure that both headquarters become fully bilingual and functional on a multinational level, while company-sized units of one country are attached to the other country's forces during exercises. Cooperation with Spain's Tercio de Armada (Marine Corps) will provide Italian amphibious forces with many assets they currently lack, such as full-fledged armored and artillery units.

THE FUTURE

The proposed plan in Italian military circles to create a joint Army-Navy Brigade, consisting of Raggruppamento San Marco and the Reggimento Lagunari "Serenissima" (which belongs to the Army) have stalled at the time of the writing of this article, due primarily to the lack of transport and landing ships able to accommodate this large force, as well as some clashes of ego stemming from inter-service rivalries. In spite of these difficulties the relationship between San Marco Marines and Army's Lagunari is extremely close and at least one company of Lagunari is often attached to San Marco Battalion during important national or international exercises.

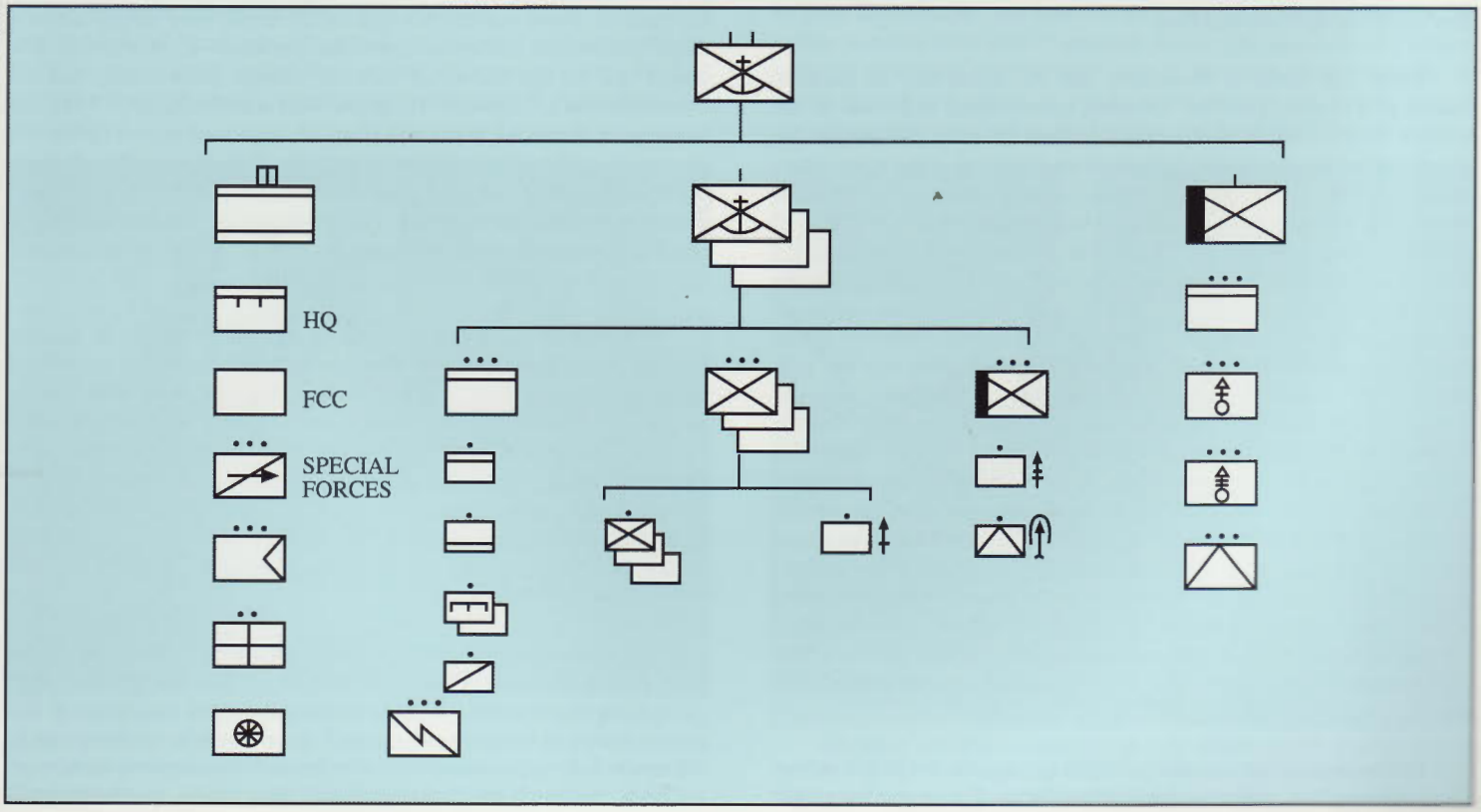
The special forces capabilities of the unit is also slated for reinforcement and expansion. The present platoon will be reorganized into a larger company, *Compagnia Operazioni Speciali* (COS) or "Special Operations Company," and will be assigned to the Raggruppamento Headquarters. Composed of highly specialized and motivated troops, the Raggruppamento Anfibio San Marco is regarded as a true elite among Italian and Allied forces.

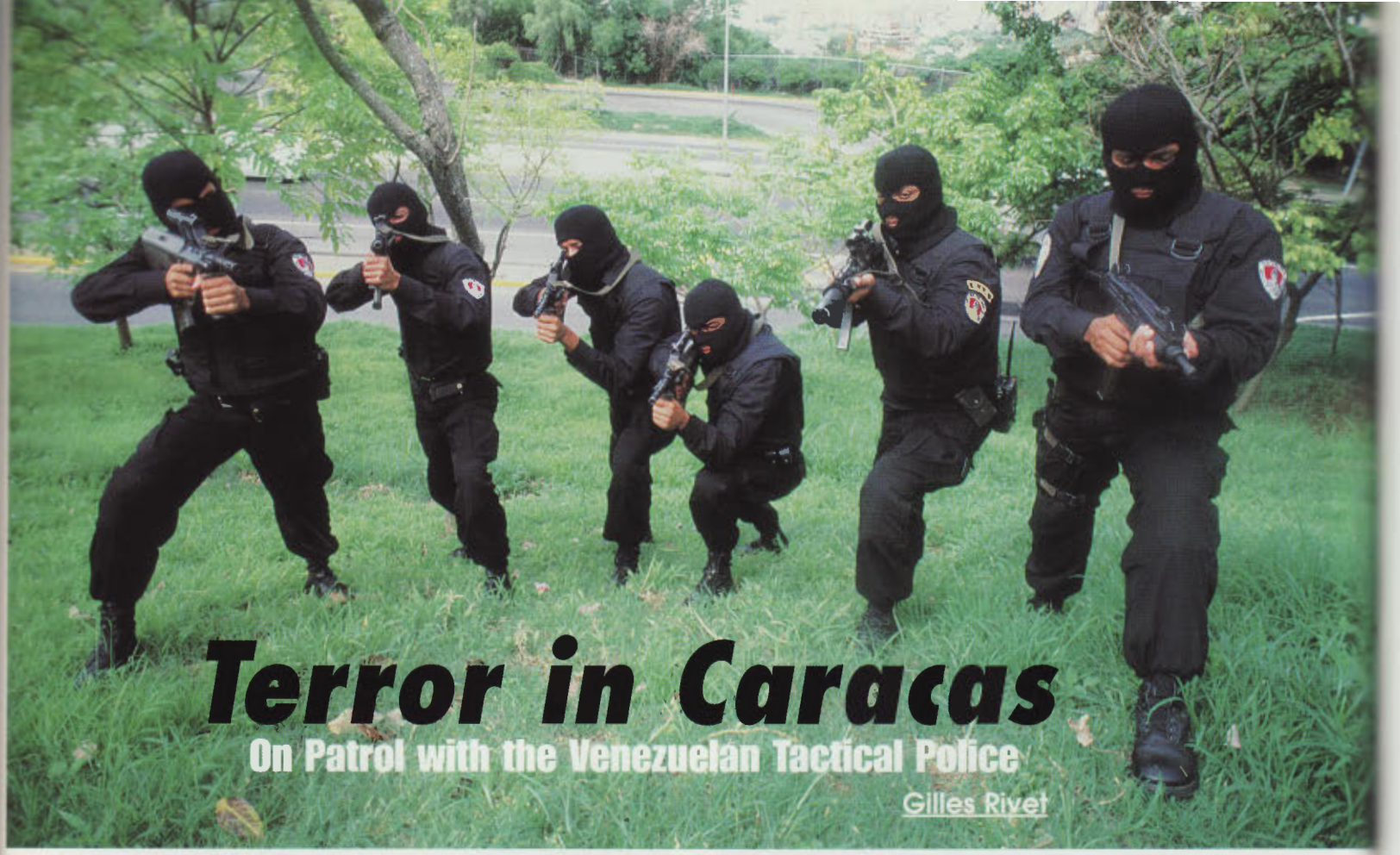
Its new structure will be the result of a long process of progressive adaptation to new missions and new procedures. The outcome will be an extraordinary flexible instrument, the expression of an original and, for many aspects, more advanced operational philosophy. Far from resting on the laurels of the results it has achieved, the "Raggruppamento Anfibio" will proceed with the unending experimentation of advanced techniques and new materials that make it a unique unit in Europe.

A squad of San Marco marines secures a landing zone for an American Navy Sea-Knight helicopter during a combined exercise in the Adriatic.

The Italian Navy has a small but effective air component of AV-8B V/STOL jets and SH-3D medium helicopters that afford the San Marco Battalion with lethal air support.

San Marco elements display their fast-rope and insertion skills courtesy of a SH-3D helicopter belonging to the "Nucleo Lotta Anfibia."





Terror in Caracas

On Patrol with the Venezuelan Tactical Police

Gilles Rivet

Although the site of masked men with guns is nothing new to Caracas, many residents are relieved that there are men in black who operate twenty-four hours a day on the side of justice.

DATELINE CARACAS. July 25, 1998: Four desperate men, known drug traffickers and men wanted by the police, hijack an Aviones de Oriente airliner at the sprawling Simon Bolivar International Airport. Armed with guns and grenade, the men demand safe passage out of the country. Yet they are also armed with the knowledge that Venezuela's cops of last resort are en route, and that unless they escape or surrender, they are living on borrowed time.

When one thinks of Venezuela, and its capital city of Caracas, images of a tropical paradise, luxurious surroundings, and some of the world's most beautiful women quickly come to mind. Yet behind the image, behind the glamour and exotic allure, lurks one of the most crime-ridden locations on the planet—Caracas, a city of some nearly 2 million, rivals Rio, Moscow, and Nairobi as being among the world's most dangerous metropolis settings. There is an average of eighty homicides a week in Caracas, nearly 150 rapes a day, and with a staggering inflation rate topping 1,000%, it is the type of city where armed robberies, extortion, and hostage-taking are part and parcel with the urban landscape. An economic boom that brought riches years ago has now spiraled violently downward engulfing the nation into collapse, corruption and disenfranchisement with a violent vengeance. The par between rich and poor is incredible. Political and social crisis' loom on a daily basis, and a flourishing narcotics industry, brought to the country by liberal banking laws and fueled by a combination of Colombian cartels, Sicilian Mafioso, and Russian mobsters, has turned the nation into one of the most important criminal headquarters on the planet. A communist revolutionary movement, one that had been defeated by the opulence and promise of oil boom wealth, has once again returned to the streets of Caracas and the jungles of the countryside. Some criminal justice experts view Caracas as one of the most desperate and dangerous cities on the planet.

In Venezuela, there are nearly 20,000 serving officers in the various state, metropolitan, and municipal police forces. The largest municipal force is Metropolitan Police Force of Caracas, with about 9,000 officers. In 1985, however, the department realized that they were seriously "behind-the-times" in terms of a tactical response to an act of terrorism, a robbery turned bad that developed into a barricade situation with hostages, or a lunatic, armed with a sniper rifle, who turned a section of downtown into a bloodbath. Exacerbating the problems encountered by the force on patrol was the fact that the criminals were simply carrying larger and heavier caliber weapons than the cops—a phenomenon that played out on the streets of America twenty years earlier had hit Venezuela with a vengeance. The police were without recourse. While the Venezuelan Army, Air Force and Navy all possessed special operations commando and counter-terrorist formations of their own, though these could not be deployed on the streets, every time a violent crime was committed. The Metropolitan Police Force of Caracas needed a commando strike team of their own. As a result, the *Brigada Acciones Especiales* was created.

While the unit responds to desperate criminal situations, its primary mission is hostage-rescue. The *Brigada Acciones Especiales* consists of forty operators and an additional thirty support staff who are on permanent on-call duty ready to be summoned into the cross-hairs of a criminal's weapon or near the trip-wire of a guerrilla's ambush. The operational force of forty men is divided into four tactical elements, each including two snipers and two EOD sappers; two of the support personnel, female officers, serve as hostage negotiators, as well as tactical EMT officers (they are cross-trained in each and every phase of the unit's tactical skills).

The unit is made up solely of volunteers and open solely to officers with at least five years of exemplary service on the regular patrol force. All volunteers must pass a difficult obstacle course of psychological and psycho-technical examinations, as well as an obstacle course meant to determine if the applicants possess the physical fitness to be a member of the team. Although the "training cycle" lasts twelve months, brigade

During a call-out in one of the more exclusive neighborhoods of Caracas, a Brigada Acciones Especiales *peers through the sights of the Heckler and Koch MP5 9mm submachine gun.*

commanders don't view an officer as "tactically ready" until he's had three years of time in the unit. The first year is dedicated to combat shooting and weapons proficiency; at this point, the trainees undergo basic parachutist instruction and learn the martial arts. The second year is reserved for heliborne insertion training and the A-to-Zs of rope work, as well as combat swimming and SCUBA operations. Finally the third year is dedicated solely to tubular assaults and the science of hostage-rescue.

The unit is headquartered in the heart of the "*Ranchéros*," the local term for Caracas, and can respond to any ongoing tactical situation or hostage-taking incident in a matter of thirty minutes. Usually, when the force is summoned, one ten-man element responds with the equipment vehicle and secures a perimeter and the team-leader will assume tactical command of the perimeter around the crime-scene, and of the entire "job." If the situation warrants—and they usually do—additional elements are summoned. The most precarious missions involve hostages seized by criminals high on drugs—such as heroin, cocaine and PCP. Unlike a terrorist incident, where the hostage-taker is trained, disciplined, and determined to promote a political agenda, drug-crazed perpetrators are volatile and can, without warning or reason, turn-off any chance for a negotiated resolution to an incident and begin the indiscriminate murder of the hostages. Many of the unit's call-outs involve drug-crazed perpetrators and these jobs are considered the most difficult—officers trained to react tactically must often sit back and wait while the individual dictates a response, and the potential for losing some of the hostages is a dire reality.

A two-man support team, keeping windows and roof-tops covered with their Steyr AUG 5.56mm assault rifles, make sure that the entry team assembled in front of a barricaded front door needs to worry about nothing else than breaching the front-door obstacle.

The unit responds to approximately two hostage-taking incidents a week—ranging from a bank-robbery gone bad, to a strung-out addict who enters a grocery market, and ends up killing ten people before finally being taken out by the brigade. The criminal and terrorist in the country are equipped with an odd and highly lethal arsenal of weaponry—and on brigade deployments, the unit has encountered everything from a .38 caliber revolver to an RPG-7 anti-tank rocket. The unit deploys a unique array of weaponry and maintains one of the most diverse arsenals in police special operations. At a time when most of the world's special operations units are fielding the Heckler and Koch MP5 family of 9mm

Armed with a combination of Israeli-produced Uzi submachine guns, MP5s and Steyr AUG assault rifles, a Brigada Acciones Especiales *prepares to make entry on a narcotics location in eastern Caracas.*

Gingerly moving about on a city street once owned by a criminal gang, two Brigada Acciones Especiales *operators slink into firing position, prior to serving a high-risk warrant.*

Although trained in the art of urban warfare, Brigada Acciones Especiales *operators are also skilled jungle fighters capable of bringing the war against crime to any and all environs.*

submachine guns, the *Brigada Acciones Especiales* also fields the Israeli-produced Uzi 9mm submachine gun. The Austrian-produced Steyr AUG 5.56mm assault rifle is also deployed, and the unit's primary marksman weapon is the Heckler and Koch PSG-1 7.62mm rifle.

Criminals and terrorists are non-discriminatory and equal-opportunity in Venezuela—they will rob, attack and hijack virtually anything in the country. As a result, the *Brigada Acciones Especiales* train religiously in the art of tubular assaults—primarily in the precarious art of assaulting a bus, train, and recently, an aircraft. The December 1994 hijacking of an Air France airliner to Marseilles, and the subsequent assault by GIGN operators, sparked great interest among the unit's command and training echelon of the *Brigada Acciones Especiales*. Aircraft hijackings have long been a Central and South America specialties, and the unit is determined to win on such a scenario. Training with aircraft belonging to VIASA (*Venezolana Internacional de Aviacon SA*), the Venezuelan national carrier, as well as other smaller domestic carriers, the *Brigada Acciones Especiales* devotes much of its busy training regimen to the art of assaulting a hijacked aircraft.

It does not appear as if the future will lessen the workload for the operators in the *Brigada Acciones Especiales*. The criminal situation in Caracas is only deteriorating, and growing ever more violent. The home-grown terrorist and organized crime factions have become increasingly sophisticated, mobile, and indiscriminate in where they attack, and who they assault. The officers of *Brigada Acciones Especiales* are under-

Responding to a barricaded drug felon holding hostages, Brigada Acciones Especiales *operators move up an iron staircase—Uzi submachine gun and Franchi SPAS 12-gauge shotguns at the ready. Of interesting note are the heavy ballistic helmets worn on actual call-outs. Although heavy and cumbersome, not to mention extremely uncomfortable in the Venezuelan heat, they do offer significant protection especially in the world of police tactics in Caracas, where perpetrators often take head shots when firing at police.*

appreciated and poorly paid, even though their work is dangerous and incessant. Yet they are a dedicated force of believers—cops who trust that justice will prevail, and that they cannot sit back while law and order crumbles around them. Perhaps that mindset is the true characteristic of the unit, and the sole salvation for the city and people of Caracas.

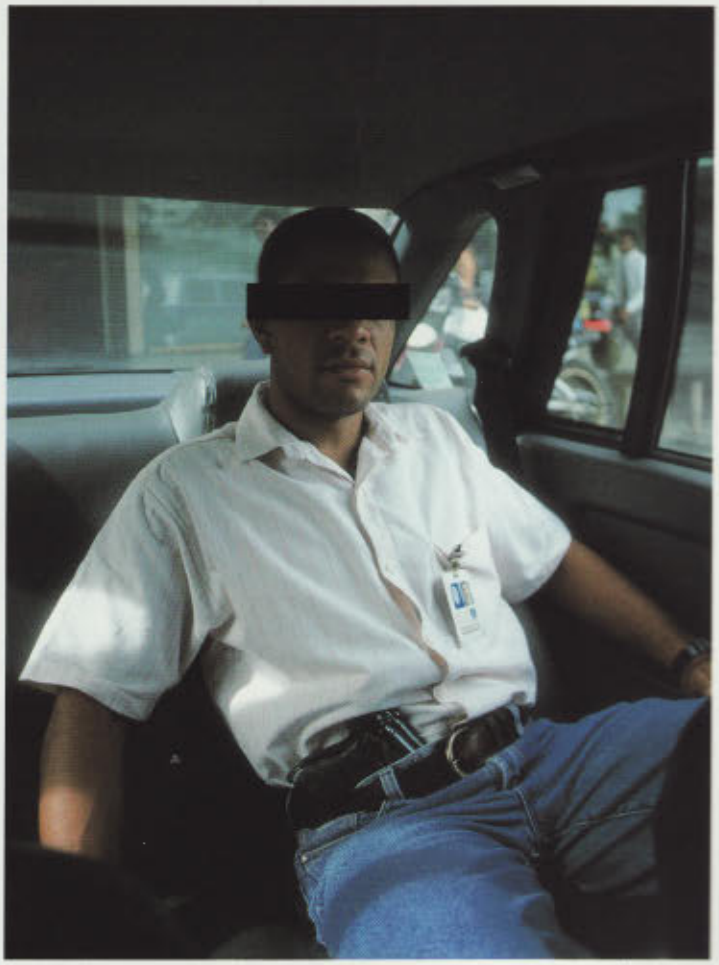
A squad of Brigada Acciones Especiales *operators slink along a jungle road prior to serving an early morning warrant on a drug lab in the suburbs of the capital city.*

A front door on a targeted location is readied for a 12-gauge dose of "shot lock," as Brigada Acciones Especiales *operators await the order to enter a barricaded location.*

Peering through the sights of his Heckler and Koch PSG-1 7.62mm sniper's rifle, a Brigada Acciones Especiales *marksman takes aim at a barricaded cocaine addict holding a family hostage during a "routine" call-out in Caracas.*

During a search of oncoming traffic for an escaped cop killer, Brigada Acciones Especiales *man "their" version of a tactical road-block.*

A daunting addition to the landscapes of a drug-infested Caracas slum—a Brigada Acciones Especiales *anti-crime deployment. Rough, ready, and reliable is the Ford Bronco – the primary mode of transport used by the* Brigada Acciones Especiales *on call-outs.*



A Caracas PD narcotics officer joins the Brigada Acciones Especiales *on a warrant.*

Sitting inside the team's Ford Bronco, a Brigada Acciones Especiales *operator nervously peers out of the window ready to respond to any threat.* Brigada Acciones Especiales *operators routinely train in the dangerous art of accurate firing from speeding vehicles.*

Although most police tactical teams around the world are now unanimous customers of the Heckler and Koch MP5 family, the Brigada Acciones Especiales still has found good use for its stock of Israeli-produced Uzis.

The Rolls Royce of police 12-gauge shotguns—the Italian-produced Franchi-Spas.

A six-man Brigada Acciones Especiales entry team poses for the camera, displaying the unit's patch, uniform, and diverse weaponry.

Law Enforcement in Venezuela

There are quite a few law enforcement agencies that protect the country's citizens from criminal and terrorist threats, including: The paramilitary National Guard in which there were four national-level police forces; an additional 450 state and municipal police forces functioned throughout the country (although state and municipal police normally operated independently, they could be mobilized under emergency conditions into a Unified Police Command); the Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services *(Direccion de Seguridad e Inteligencia Policial—DISIP)* which is a non-uniformed force of some 3,000 personnel under the Ministry of Interior. DISIP's nationwide jurisdiction included the investigation of crimes involving subversion, narcotics, and arms smuggling. DISIP's responsibilities include operations against terrorists and other potentially violent groups, including organized crime and narcotics cartels. DISIP's director is appointed by the Minister of Interior, and is headquartered in Caracas, with field offices in principal cities throughout the country.

The Technical and Judicial Police (*Policia Tecnica y Judicial*—PTJ) is a component of the Ministry of Justice. It fielded over 3,000 plain-clothes personnel in 1990. The PTJ handled most of the country's investigative police work; other police agencies passed on all cases requiring investigation to the PTJ. The President, on the advice of the Minister of Justice, appointed the organization's director, who was required to be a lawyer. Most PTJ personnel were assigned to its headquarters in Caracas. Numerous divisions and subdivisions throughout the country handled field work. New agents were required to have completed at least three years of secondary education and to undergo several months of training at the National Academy in Caracas before assuming their duties.

The Traffic Police was a force of about 2,000 under the Ministry of Transport and Communications. In addition to national traffic control, the Traffic Police were responsible for issuing and regulating drivers' licenses and for determining public transportation routes and services. All local police forces received their funding through the Ministry of Interior but responded to state governors under normal conditions. The Metropolitan Police Force, which maintained a Police Academy in El Junquito near Caracas, was comparatively well trained. In contrast, other state and municipal forces fielded largely untrained personnel and suffered from deficiencies in communications, transportation, supplies, and facilities.

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